

# THE VICTORIAN MORALITY OF ART

AN ANALYSIS OF RUSKIN'S ESTHETIC

By  
HENRY LADD



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## INTRODUCTION

The theory of painting, architecture and sculpture which established John Ruskin's influence in Victorian times scarcely outlived his century. Even before 1914 it became evident that Ruskin's significance to an industrial age rested more in his criticism of the economic order of Victorian society than in his theories of the beautiful. This was partly Ruskin's own fault. In the latter part of his career he invariably introduced a social, moral or religious interest into the brilliant but dictatorial criticism of pictures. Such interests tended to obscure the esthetic principles which he believed he was still following.

Gradually his theory of art was smothered under the very ramifications it had developed. Even before his death his principles were extravagantly distorted by selected quotations which were chosen largely for the purpose of supporting a morality already discarded by a younger generation. The artistic revolution at the end of the century and the increasing twentieth century contempt for Victorian phraseology completed the burial of the intellectual skeleton that now rests within the first dozen of the thirty-nine volumes on library shelves. Although the ghosts of many of his dearest beliefs still flutter through the pages of conservative treatises, his opinions, for more than twenty years, have been considered dead. A few quotations, moreover, concerning the relation of morals to art have become entirely dissociated from their proper

context, the drama of their relationships has been lost to our generations.

But skeletons put safely away by one generation have a habit of turning up to embarrass the next; the morphological eccentricity of a fossil has more than once helped to solve the riddles of living forms. Systems of ideas or theories may establish identities as distinct as the personalities which formed them, the story of their character and development may serve to illustrate an epoch. This is particularly true of a theory so comprehensive, so dogmatic, so willful as Ruskin's; for though he began with the defense of one painter, he found himself explaining the message of many of his age. Engaged in these difficulties he completely altered his religious views, shifted his point of view toward art itself and discovered the far reaching theory of economic value so disruptive to the then current Victorian political economy. In the examination of a dead theory, therefore, it is my hope that the intellectual curvatures of its growth may illustrate certain typical habits of nineteenth century thought, that the spirit of human rationalization which enfolds its structure may stimulate comments upon the artistic attitudes of our times.

Ruskin's theory of art is at best a monster—no expatiation upon its virtues, manifold as they are, can make it matter of fact or common sense. This is not to deny its historical importance as a theory or to belittle the actual and enormous influence of the critic who fabricated it, these are obvious, its complexity obscure. The classic formalities of beginning, middle and end are not characteristics of Ruskin's work; in his theoretical system one must expect to behold twists, turns, reversions and inver-

sions, scars and bandages which make the whole a grotesque, a curiosity, a phantasy of a rather magnificent, but undeniably tortured intellect. The monster, however, has three expressions that appear and reappear over a period of some thirteen years, and if one follows these he will have a pretty fair description of the spirit as well as the body. The ways, in short, in which Ruskin used the terms Truth, Beauty, Morality, their scope, their relation and their contradiction, unfold the principal centers of his doctrine of art.

But these symbols of controversy must be approached with some knowledge of the ritual, some understanding of the traditions which shaped the ideas Ruskin took so seriously. He had been reading certain important works on philosophy and esthetics when he began his theoretical chapters in the first volume of *Modern Painters*. The formal divisions of his subject there laid out, the simplified definitions so swiftly and compactly put down, entirely obscure the formidable complexity of their development in subsequent volumes. His definition, for example, that "art is nothing but a noble and expressive language" called for a great many more pages of exposition than he would, in 1843, (when the first volume was published) have believed possible. His five categories of ideas, "Ideas of Imitation, Power, Truth, Beauty and Relation," which he believed art might be said to convey, embarrassed him again and again in his later theorizing.

The formality of his introduction rested more upon an adaptation of his reading than upon his experience of art itself. Reading and his association with conventional attitudes toward painting supplied the grounds for his origi-

inality, for his revolt against the dying classicism of a preceding period. It is for these reasons that I have attempted to discover what earlier theories of art may have affected the terminology of his system and the formal conceptions of his initial plan. For the three central supports of Ruskin's argument cannot be adequately revealed until the façade of the first chapters of *Modern Painters* is appreciated in the light of the theoretical conventions which influenced it.

PART I

THE TRUTH AND BEAUTY OF ART





## CHAPTER I

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TRADITIONS

#### CRITICISM AND CONNOISSEURS

THE early eighteenth century in England saw the rise of a systematic criticism of the fine arts. The previous century had produced musical handbooks, manuals of architecture and several important treatises on poetry. Some of the latter contained allusions to sculpture and occasionally to painting but criticism of the plastic arts did not go much beyond the casual praise and prejudice of a Pepys or an Evelyn. Theoretical opinion in so far as it referred to painting, sculpture or architecture relied exclusively on Italian or French authorities.

By 1730, however, a dozen or more books on art had appeared, most of them concerned with Italian painting or the classical or religious history which formed the subjects of famous pictures.<sup>1</sup> In so far as these were consciously critical, in so far as they defined and applied principles they still followed French or Italian guides. They differed only in the freedom of translation or slight adaptations to national taste. Self-conscious in manner and definitely on the defensive, the new criticism remained for several decades essentially derivative. Even the best of the new critics, Jonathan Richardson, who influenced Reynolds more than fifty years later, differed little from the French Du Piles or the Italian Du Fresnoy whose famous poem<sup>2</sup> on painting Dryden had been persuaded to translate in 1695. Richardson's *Essay on the*

*Theory of Painting* (1715) and *The Connoisseur* (1719), though original in certain critical formulae,<sup>3</sup> in style and in the selection of examples, held close to the traditional method of the continent. His judgments followed an already crystallized continental academism which turned to Vasari for its historical data and to sixteenth and seventeenth century interpretations of Aristotle for its theory,<sup>4</sup> a progenitor of the English Augustanism which was soon to profess a doctrine of imitation from nature and hold up the ancients as models

The continental canon of taste had considered poetry the highest of the arts; in England it was equally esteemed Richardson was one of the first to defend the dignity and usefulness of painting Within this province historical and religious painting had claimed the greatest reverence, portraiture received respect, but landscape was allowed serious consideration only when it contained architecture and human figures These estimates Richardson followed strictly.

The continental criticism which directed his opinions was no vulgar science, it was highly analytical, rigid and elaborate. It defined terms more sharply than the fluid writings of the nineteenth century Invention, Expression, Composition, Color, Design, Handling, Grace and Greatness were nicely and exactly weighed in their relative importance. Precision was characteristic of the judgments, a balanced observation of subject, form and manner directed the conclusions.

The chief difference between the eighteenth and nineteenth century criticism of art lies in the care with which the earlier critics divided painting into "parts," justly discussing the relationship of each part to the whole composition Subject matter received considerable, though I do not believe undue, attention, for technical and esthetic qualities were seriously esteemed Respectable subject

matter, however, was limited to religious or classical themes. There were serious discussions of canon, which followed various ecclesiastical authorities in limiting representation of things "Divine, Spiritual and Inanimate" <sup>5</sup> Although the earlier criticism followed no real historical methods the tradition of the cultural superiority of art was well established. Among English critics of the latter half of the eighteenth century, painting, which was often compared to poetry, was praised for its instructive and uplifting powers. The eighteenth century classicist was not really so far from the twentieth century individualist as is often supposed. The connoisseur was as consciously and inaccurately learned as his descendant the magazine critic. The language of criticism was brittle with clichés, little knowledge and much articulate appreciation signified refinement. Finally, it took three-quarters of a century for the pressure of industry to remove the practice of the arts from the requirements of a young gentleman's education. It was the emphasis upon practice rather than mere appreciation which inspired the early treatises on painting. They were ostensibly practical, they were handbooks for the information of amateurs, as well as guides to aid the nice taste of collectors and dilettantes.

It is not surprising, therefore, that esthetic issues as such remained rudimentary. It was inevitable that the mechanical concept of nature should influence criticism. Newton's discoveries had led to the belief in universal truths and these were found to be important to the artist. The artist himself was half-scientist; he followed laws, he composed by the intricate application of principles. Reynolds thought that the "science" of his art could, with intelligent discipline, be mastered by any student. It was not difficult to believe that art imitated nature when nature revealed the principles of formal design and art itself followed a mechanical tradition. The great mas-

ters of the past were as easily esteemed for their universal vision as for their individuality, their works manifestly imitated nature's general plan and students might well imitate their works. The so-called Greek sculptures—really the famous Roman copies in Rome—the chief masters of the Italian Renaissance, Holbein, Vandyck, Rubens from the north, the Bolognese school and the Roman school of the seventeenth century—these became the authoritative masters—examples of an artistic dogma called the grand style.

Theorists, then as always, accepted the prevailing canon of taste and rationalized the prejudice of connoisseurs. They were constructively "imitative," professing the Aristotelian doctrine of "Imitation" as their basis, but they followed devious interpretations—indeed, such diverse emphases that the historian is at a loss to draw order out of chaos. Esthetic opinion swings back and forth between the notion that art is a literal copy of nature and the Plotinian concept of beauty as an expression of reason through a symbolic hierarchy of "ideas." Poetic criticism complicates an already complex tradition by the effort to link poetry with painting under classical authority.<sup>6</sup> Finally, a thread of speculation concerning the sublime, faintly reminiscent of Longinus (who had been translated in 1652) and stressing sensation as the source of esthetic pleasure, crosses the neo-classical fabric and inextricably tangles theoretical patterns. Through seven decades of the 18th century there is no certain development of single lines of thought. It can be said of the critics of art as of literature that "each critic, in the eighteenth century, tries to embody in one code the whole corpus of critical tradition with all its contradictions; he is in himself both romantic and classic, or more accurately, perhaps, both not romantic and not classic."<sup>7</sup> Bosanquet can discover order only by turning

from the English theorizing to German metaphysics and, by the light of sharper issues, tracing back certain threads of influence to Shaftesbury, Hogarth, Lord Kames and Edmund Burke. The English themselves had little in common but their determination to deduce some practical canon of beauty from the new scientific methods and the ancient but utterly confused doctrines of art.

The canon of the grand style, however, preserved some semblance of order in art criticism. The connoisseur persisted in restricting polite taste. The grand style had its roots in the social life of the late seventeenth century. It was an expression of supposedly classic virtue—nobility. In art this meant the dramatizing of obvious formal elements. Great sculpture was thought to represent the highest traits of human character through the most eloquent but restrained postures of the body. All the “parts” of painting—chiaroscuro, color, design, even the invention of detail in subject matter, the expression of the faces and the attitudes of figures—were said to derive their direction and their relationships to one another from the central conception of the subject itself. The idea—beautiful or sublime, but always noble—was to be embodied in a formalized and, as we should now say, artificial “imitation of nature.”

If one reasoned from the grand style, argument began with the classical doctrine of imitation. The casuist who attempted to justify taste was generally unaware of subtleties. He passed by theoretical bugbears without seeing them. He said simply that nature meant “*la belle nature*,” the nature, not of change and stress, but of certain, eternal and unchanging law. This view appeared to be supported on the one hand by the general laws of the new science, and on the other by the formal and idealized conceptions of human nature to be found in “classical”

poetry and sculpture and in renaissance sculpture and paintings To such a theorist art appeared to be a structural formality Its concern was principally with beauty, and beauty analyzed equalled the grand style Thus organized, formal representation of noble subject matter was the imitation of the general truth of nature or art!

But beauty became an easy prey to fashion, sensation, wit The selection of noble elements might stress the dramatic rather than the true; the elegant might appear the virtuous Casuist and connoisseur projected the formalities of their society on the limited world they called natural. However much idealized, grand conceptions could still be considered imitations of nature, for nature herself was seen only in the mirror of the mind. Baroque art, indeed, was soon justified on the same grounds that had been used to explain the simpler forms of Roman sculptures Even the excessive ornamentation called rococo was theorized into that "ideal selection" which must occur in the process of imitating nature Many even avowed that nature was to be "improved upon"; it was "Nature still," said Pope, but "Nature methodized."

#### FORMALISM

The best example of this formalistic distortion and certainly the most original of the earlier theories was Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* (1753) Whether Hogarth was more interested in puzzling the critics whom he held in contempt than in discovering the secret of beautiful composition remains an open question. But Ruskin, as many before him, took Hogarth seriously enough to disagree with his principles

*The Analysis* is extremely limited; it avoids metaphysical issues and discusses merely the formal elements of art. With vague allusions to Roman works on art

Hogarth implies that he has extended his reading beyond the theories of Aristotle and Plotinus. He has little use for Durer's principles of mathematical construction, but believes that Michael Angelo (with the pyramidal principles of composition attributed to him), Du Fresnoy and Du Piles have up to his own time solved the riddle of the beautiful most comprehensively.

Hogarth assumes that the end of art is to please by enticing the eye of the beholder to delight in certain compositions. The favorite formalistic principles, unity and variety, explain the vigour of artistic composition as well as the organic beauty in man and animal. He observes that proportion in these natural forms is related to function. Static balance or symmetry is seldom to be found; rather, a proportion various enough to suggest change, the result of perfect adaptation of bodies to their natural functions. From these observations Hogarth infers that fitness and propriety are principles of nature, that they should therefore control the composition of objects of art, and that only certain types of line can be at once proper and beautiful.

The waving and the spiral lines, he says, appear in every object that might be called beautiful, graceful or elegant. The waving line is the source of beauty, the spiral the source of grace, their combination results in elegance! From his gallery of amusing illustrations it is difficult to choose one more pertinent than another. But seven corsets or stays, as he calls them, characteristically illustrate his gay theory. Each stay possesses a greater or less degree of elegance ranging from that designed for the ordinary male figure to that appropriate for the corpulent female. The former he decides has a meager claim to beauty, the latter an equally slight claim to elegance, but number four follows the most perfect combination of the wave with the spiral. It is therefore the

most elegant As an additional proof he claims that it will fit the medium between the spare male and the opulent female It is therefore the stay for the most perfect feminine figure, it incorporates the secret of beauty Q.E.D In such instances it is difficult to believe that Hogarth was not ridiculing critical pedantry or the principles derived from "*la belle nature*"

#### EMPIRICAL TENDENCIES

Although Hogarth's *Analysis* was the first formalistic esthetics in eighteenth century England, it appeared fifteen years after the very distinct and historically important conjectures of David Hume, whose *Treatise on Human Nature* encouraged empirical speculation In Hume one may discern the beginnings of an esthetic opposed to all the formalism that inspired Hogarth Here the new English science, the scepticism of Hobbes, and the analysis of human understanding made by Locke are the suggestive sources. Hume is not primarily concerned with beauty or indeed with art, but in the individual mind, rather than in the formal representation of art itself, he seeks an explanation for the experience called beauty

There, he discovers, pleasure and pain are its very constituents He lifts the whole question out of formalistic tangles and leaves it in the realm of psychology Sensation and feeling, for Hume, are the essence of taste. He attempts to discriminate between possessive interest and the interest in beauty by referring the latter feelings to objective forms upon which they center Beauty is thus not an ideal, nor an objective proportion, nor a form, it is a way of feeling in reference to something—an experience.

Hume's views were the beginning of an English em-



pirical and psychological esthetics,<sup>8</sup> the full possibilities of which were not realized till Ogden, Richards and Wood nearly two centuries later conceived their *Foundation of Esthetics* (1922) Edmund Burke's *Essay on the Sublime & the Beautiful* (1756) made practically no advance over Hume's position, nor did the arguments of John Baillie (*Essay on the Sublime*, 1749) which may have been Burke's inspiration. It was not Baillie, however, or the important French writers to whom Burke refers,<sup>9</sup> that were seriously read by early nineteenth century critics and by Ruskin Except for the reputation of his eloquence it is difficult to see why the statesman's callow treatise should have received the attention it drew for more than a century Yet the fact that utilitarian philosophy spent itself upon rationalistic schemes of behavior rather than upon further psychological investigation, and that no Utilitarian concerned himself with a theory of poetry or art until Ruskin's day, may have left Burke's early essay in a position of singular interest The *Elements of Criticism*, by Henry Home, Lord Kames (1761), though it shows empirical tendencies, made no advance in its conclusions over Burke

Both Burke and Lord Kames limit their investigation largely to the province of human nature Like Crousaz and Du Bos in France they recognize sensation as the basis upon which to build a definition of beauty This is an avoidance of, rather than a break with, classical tradition Lord Kames is clearly conversant with more than one aspect of Greek theory and frankly expresses the current enthusiasm for the supreme authority of Greek art He protests against any theory that would make mere proportion or symmetry the central constituents of beauty, and in this one suspects he is following Plotinus. Burke also makes this protest, probably for different reasons than Kames or Plotinus. Burke was consciously ob-

jecting to Hogarth's belief that the formal principle of fitness, propriety or proportion is fundamental to the nature of beauty. He was also avoiding the moral Platonism of Shaftesbury and the intellectualism which pervades Hutcheson's theories. Burke indeed is very skillful in steering clear of the traditional neo-classicism which tangled the sensation-theory of Lord Kames and in compromising with the universal eighteenth century opinion that art must please in order to instruct. He classifies human experience simply and superficially with no apparent knowledge of the intellectualist traditions connected with the beautiful. Yet these over-simplifications are his weaknesses <sup>10</sup>

In line with Du Bos and Crousaz and Baillie, Burke assumes that all esthetic experience is based upon "the passions" or sensation. The essence of Beauty is pleasure, of the sublime "astonishment" or a pain-pleasure. Burke's historical significance, in the opinion of Bosanquet, lies in his demarcation of an esthetic experience, but it is an open question whether his pleasure-pain esthetic is as specific as the superficial but suggestive theory of "enthusiastick passion" of John Dennis <sup>11</sup>. Burke distinguishes, for example, the experience of painful delight in viewing calamities from the actual suffering of tragic cause or consequence, but he compares our interest in a sublime tragedy to that in a sublime hanging, only "to demonstrate the weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of real sympathy." At this point he deliberately rejects Aristotle's theory of catharsis and in doing so makes it clear that he has missed the point of the famous theory of tragedy, for Aristotle obviously would have refused to consider the interest in a hanging comparable to the sympathy excited by sublime tragedy.

Moreover, Burke is no more illuminating concerning

the analogous distinctions in the realm of beauty there is no real attempt to distinguish between the pleasure excited by "smooth" objects and that stimulated by objects of possessive or sexual desire. Though Burke allows for the ugly (the exact opposite of beauty) in art, he classifies it under the sublime, implying its stimulation of the mixed pain-pleasure rather than the delight which beautiful or graceful objects afford. Finally, he makes no real analysis of the range and quality of pleasure, holds taste to be "no other than refined judgment" on the experience of the senses and does not analyze the increasingly important questions of skill or realistic representation.<sup>12</sup>

#### ECLECTICISM

By the middle of the eighteenth century, then, two traditions, one formal, the other empirical, had become established. These were blended into a wise but common-sense eclecticism by Sir Joshua Reynolds. The opinions briefly stated in his three papers written for the *Idler* (1758-59) were given full utterance in the famous *Discourses* presented as lectures before the Royal Academy from 1769 to 1790. Reynolds' influence can scarcely be overestimated, he was connected with the founding of the Royal Academy and indulged in some extremely shrewd intrigue. He developed an enormous reputation not only for the brilliance of his portraiture but for his mastery of the "grand style," for he was too talented a painter to practice exactly the traditional doctrines he preached. His rhetoric partially compensated for his inability to get good likenesses. Because of his personality, the graceful cadence of his prose and the sense of his opinions, he gradually became the fountain head of academic wisdom in the fine arts. Though his theories were completely derived and suavely blended he remained robustly honest.

in his practical advice. Even his lectures demonstrated that he cared much more for serviceable knowledge than for theoretical speculations.

His *Discourses*, nevertheless, exerted a powerful influence on theory, they are a curious mixture of precise observation and vague conjecture. Having read Richardson and the French critic Du Piles he was aware of traditional attitudes. Yet he was not completely subservient to convention. He accepted, for example, the doctrine of "Imitation" but he disclaimed both the literal and the intellectualist interpretations. Nature, said Reynolds, is the source of all artistic truth, but to copy everything literally would mean that the artist must disregard the importance of style in art and the actual presence in nature of accidental disproportion.<sup>13</sup>

But Reynolds did not therefore proceed to a neo-Platonic explanation of reality in art, nor did he devise a formalistic theory of beauty. Rather, he inclines toward an empirical approach which implies a recognition of the importance of form as such but suggests also an analysis of imagination. The principles of congruity, coherence and consistency, he believed, had their roots deep in man's psychological character, and this, he thought, rather than art itself, would eventually yield up beauty's secret to the scientist. He made no attempt himself to investigate such matters, but believing firmly in the value of rules, principles and scientific analysis, he thought genius itself could be fathomed.

In this connection he observes that painting is the most sensual of the arts and that its power is therefore the greatest, though more easily abused. While he attacks vague, inspirational explanations of genius with an insistence upon the value of exact knowledge and rigorous discipline, he is no pedant. He does not overestimate schools nor organized discipline, and he definitely be-

believes in idealizing subjects Art for him, as for the age, is instructive, historical painting remains at the top The right kind of "invention" so represents the mental picture on the canvas as to strike the imagination, ennoble the traits of human character and awake in the beholder the highest passions of the soul

It was in solving the riddle of imitation—in showing how art could be at once true and imaginative—that Reynolds became so important He summarized for artists the chief tenets of the *Essay on Criticism* and inadvertently illuminated the contradictions in the body of critical tradition The problem of representation became the very center of his theory and his particular solution incited Ruskin some fifty years later to disagree "If it is true," said Reynolds, "that art, as tradition asserts, is imitating nature and if it is also true, as common sense insists, that art is ennobling the sentiments of human beings, just how do literal truth and ideals enter the same conception?" If one emphasizes the ideal, how can one claim any scientific basis for artistic knowledge, and if one emphasizes the literal copy, how can one achieve elegance, the grand style, which any real artist knows is for him at least the ideal?

Sir Joshua completely settles this difficulty by what he calls, in the *Idler* Papers, "the idea of central form" He turns, as a good eighteenth century philosopher should, to the world of nature Here he finds beauty to consist in the general idea of any species "As there is one general idea," he says, "belonging to human kind, so there is in each class one common idea and central form which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class" The artist's business is to observe these general forms which, being abstracted, are more true than the perceptions of accidental variations They are also naturally ideal Thus, "great painters correct nature by

herself, her imperfect, by her more perfect." But only "knowledge of exact form," only discipline and serious cultivation of artistic powers may make possible the representation of "*la belle nature*" Imagination in distinguishing the permanent form from the transient and skill in the rendering of nature's design are essential to a great style.

#### DYING CLASSICISM

Reynolds' influence was, as I have said, far reaching. It was also lasting. The doctrine of the abstract or "general form" of things remained the accepted, academic, explanation of "Beauty" and the theoretical basis for the "grand style" till sometime after the appearance of *Modern Painters*. It flourished long after the literary classicism of Rymer<sup>14</sup> and Pope and Dennis had given way to romantic concepts of nature and of poetry which Joseph Warton and Edward Young had encouraged. But empiricism and idealism in art criticism were far from lifeless. Slowly but certainly the materialistic and idealistic concepts of other theorists qualify the classicism of James Barry, John Opie and the eccentric Swiss priest and professor Fuseli, each of whom believed himself to be following Reynolds. Their lectures reflect the influence of psychological theories of association<sup>15</sup> and revived neo-platonism.

The neo-Platonic interpretation of nature and art had even in England a long history. It goes back to the literary criticism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to the moral idealism of Shaftesbury<sup>16</sup> and Hutcheson<sup>17</sup> who lived into the eighteenth century. These founders of the Scotch common sense school are not primarily concerned with esthetic issues, but in so far as they touch upon art, "Imitation" and "Beauty" their views are adaptations of Plotinus to the naturalistic the-

ology of the seventeenth century God was identified by them with Nature and with Reason, "Beauty" thus became a representation of this ideal trinity, a symbolic representation, moreover, which reflected the moral order. The "moral sense," a term evidently coined by Shaftesbury, was believed to be the connecting link between intellect and sensation, hence the chief guide in matters of feeling and an instrument of didactic purpose in the arts. It was the master of the passions.

Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, nevertheless, like the French theorist Crousaz, made it perfectly clear that beauty though intellectual was revealed through sense perceptions formally combined to express sentiments and ideas. Hutcheson went so far as to lift beauty from the realm of moral will, even from intellect; but because he had no exact definitions for the moral sense, the higher emotions and the sentiments he failed to distinguish an esthetic experience from the various experience of mind. Like Shaftesbury, who was more connoisseur than philosopher, he was impressed with the formal character of art and by emphasizing the intellectualist principle of order ("unity in variety"), he lessened the importance of sensation.

Now in spite of the empirical tendency of French esthetics and of Burke's *Essay*, the didactic purpose of art had remained unquestioned. The traditional belief in an intellectual ideal of perfect beauty had been continued by James Harris whose *Three Treatises* ("Concerning Art," "Concerning Music, Painting and Poetry" and "Concerning Happiness") appeared in 1744 and by the *Dialogue on Beauty* (1752) and *Polymetis* (1755) of Joseph Spence, the author of the famous *Anecdotes*. Toward the end of the century, the moral aims of art are coupled by Barry and Opie with an enthusiasm for historical painting which with the most literary literalness was held to

be the ideal art Under the august wings of the grand style the historical manner became authoritative, and by pretentious argument the professors of painting justified the hanging of magnificent monstrosities

The very fact that these professors, like the sculptor Flaxman, smothered Reynolds' common sense opinions by exploiting the idealistic possibilities in his theory is significant of the brief revival of neo-Platonic theory. Perhaps the publication of *The Reflections upon Beauty and Taste in Painting* by Anthony Raphael Mengs (1796)<sup>18</sup> stimulated them, but the platonism in the lectures of Victor Cousin, the popular French critic of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, bears witness to the widespread interest in notions of intellectual symbolism Indeed, it is this revival that stimulates Hazlitt to write his unsympathetic and realistic essay *On the Ideal*, it is the same idealistic tendency which finally, through obvious German influence, reaches its most original English exposition in the critical essays of Coleridge.

Barry's theory of the beautiful is to be gathered from his lectures<sup>19</sup> on the principles and rules of painting, rather than from his historical writings It is a simple idealistic theory, adapted from Reynolds with the addition of religious idealism from the Scotch theorists. Great art, the best, is the representation of things better than they are. The idea of "the better" is to be obtained from general or abstract nature, where the ideals of beauty, wisdom and sublimity are mirrored. The Creator, God, is responsible for this perfection in "General Nature" All facts selected from nature are to be chosen for their beauty, truth, and moral interest. These facts are to be worked into an harmonious design, and the significance of this conception is to be ideal, moral, and informative according to the capacity for beauty given the artist by



God. There is no real comprehension of metaphysical points

Barry's successor as Professor of Painting, and consequently Lecturer before the Royal Academy, John Opie, has little skill as a writer but his lectures are historically interesting. They show more clearly than Barry's how Academism was confusing Reynolds' views. Opie begins with Reynolds' reverence for the grand style, but in dealing with the problem of representation he interprets "Imitation" literally. Instead of following Aristotle by saying that art should represent things better than they are, Opie insists that the appearance of things must be imitated exactly, and strictly. A selection of facts from nature, nevertheless, forms the "Conception" of a picture. This he would make by choosing the most perfect facts, but the most perfect facts from nature turn out to be the general facts, whence he arrives at the definition of art which is close to Reynolds' art is the exact copy of general ideas.

At this point Opie interpolates a curious and confounding suggestion. The selection of general facts, he believes, will inevitably follow the principle of *the association of ideas*—a notion borrowed from a very unclassical tradition of esthetics—yet this association of ideas itself should conform, he says, to the laws of nature! Now the laws of nature meant to Opie the general forms which Reynolds discussed and, by stealing the doctrine of association from an empirical esthetics which he does not understand, Opie is illustrating the clash of traditional arguments.

But Opie's theoretical muddle offers a possible explanation of imaginative elements in art which Reynolds neglected. Association of ideas explains fancy, and "the laws of nature" assure theoretical restraint. That Opie is no empiricist is evident from his final idealism: the

artist's problem lies, he believes, in the connection of mind with matter—obviously suggestive of Mengs' "Reflections"—and the manner of this connection is that of distinguishing "The Harmonious, Consistent, Energetic, from the Absurd, Superfluous and Inefficient." In these terms there is an amusing combination of the neo-Platonic interest in form with the scientific interest in material and natural force. Because of what he considers the current objection to the term "General Ideas" (an indication of the decline of Reynolds' authority) Opie says he will use the term "general principles of nature", by this remark he demonstrates his utter inability to distinguish between a fact and a principle, or even between an idea, an emotion and a fact.

But Opie also shows that he had been reading empirical or psychological theories; yet he will not give up the traditional reverence for nobility, instruction and moral ideals. He shares the full faith in the nobility of historical painting, which above all other kinds, may mirror before men the "Harmonious, Consistent, Energetic General Ideas" or principles of nature or—in plain fact—moral sentiments that justify fine art.<sup>20</sup> His confusion is typical of the essentially unphilosophical nature of these three popular critics, whose dicta Haydon and other enthusiasts for the cause of art, at the beginning of Ruskin's career, followed implicitly.

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At the close of each chapter I have listed the secondary sources to which I am particularly indebted for material

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## CHAPTER II

### RUSKIN AND TRADITION

#### THE FIVE CATEGORIES

RUSKIN was not aware of the variety in esthetic speculation that marked the century before his, he was not widely read. He was ignorant of Jonathan Richardson who influenced Reynolds, and he seems never to have read Hume, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Gerard, Baillie or Spence. The empirical suggestions of the earlier French writers were unknown to him except as they appeared in Burke's *Essay* and he had not yet given himself the privilege of losing patience with the confusing subtleties of German idealism. Far from being a handicap, his ignorance left him unembarrassed by too great familiarity with the theoretical chessboard. Locke, Hogarth, Burke, Reynolds and the Academicians he knew, and they inevitably suggested the problems which had been the chief theoretical interests of the eighteenth century. To certain theories he took an aversion, as for instance the literal theory of Imitation supported by Opie and Fuseli, but with other opinions he fell into line. His formal divisions of subject, his initial concept of art, his terms themselves are specifically reminiscent.

His introduction is formal, therefore, but not metaphysically complex. The development of composite theory that characterises the latter part of *Modern Painters* had not yet begun. He skims along the edge of difficulties with no apparent realization of their depth.

He tries to write simply, he feels an aversion for the over subtlety of esthetic speculation; yet he cuts the province of art into five nice categories, defines and redefines with a casuistry unembarrassed by experience or learning. This classification, though tedious, is paramount to any story of the growth of his opinions. It is responsible for many of his later embarrassments. I shall attempt, therefore, to paraphrase his chapters before attempting to reveal the specific sources of his reasoning.

"Art," he says, "is nothing but a noble and expressive language," and because language appears valuable in what it communicates, so art is to be understood in terms of the ideas it conveys. The rhetorical excellence of language—the formal perfection of an art—is classified as one of the five chief ideas which art communicates. "Ideas of Power" are nothing more than skill or expert expressiveness! The higher the ability of the artist, the greater will be the impression of power in the artistic work. But the value of the work of art rests in other ideas as well, specifically, in their degree of greatness. "That art is the greatest which conveys to the mind the greatest number of greatest ideas." This is Ruskin's preliminary generalization upon the nature of "Greatness in Art."

If one but glances at the five categories of "Power," "Imitation," "Truth," "Beauty" and "Relation" their traditional nature will be apparent. The various foci of eighteenth century esthetic argument turn up page by page, not historically understood, but restated in Ruskin's own manner and adapted to his own ends. "Ideas of Power" suggest, as I have said, the province the formal perfection or technical skill which Hogarth and all formalists regard as the chief source of the pleasure in art. Yet Ruskin has cleverly opposed Hogarth by separating the

idea of skill from those of beauty on the one hand and representation on the other.

A more astute example of Ruskin's discrimination is to be seen in the second and third divisions of his scheme. The literal interpretation of Aristotelian tradition is sharply distinguished from the poetic or ideal. "Ideas of Imitation" are not to be confused with "Ideas of Truth." His allusions indicate that Ruskin is trying to separate the theory of representation held by the Academicians Barry, Opie and Fuseli from another theory which is partly Reynolds' and partly his own. "Ideas of Imitation" are to be found, he says, in the pleasure derived from works of art which cause a kind of sudden surprise because they are not what they seem to be. The works of minor Dutch painters whose verisimilitude is famous are examples. Such paintings, he believes, rely upon a kind of deception. The supposed virtuosity does not really exist, for the likeness or exact similitude is false.

Ruskin is not referring to the fundamental deception in the artistic media of paint, marble or line, he knew well enough that medium of every art must be recognized as medium. He refers rather to the method of pretentious "copy" where one sense is tricked into contradicting another. "The eye seeing round while the finger feels flat." He refers to the attempts to fool beholders by an illusion that destroys the importance of all medium: the attempt to make an observer believe that paint is not paint but texture, or that pink marble is not stone but flesh. These efforts seem to him contemptible and base. Contemptible because "the mind rejects address to the thing represented"—it fixes upon the irrelevant fact of deception; base because the subjects of imitation are petty—it being impossible to imitate anything really great.

It is just here that "Imitation," when examined alongside of true painting, is seen in its frailty. Imitative ideas

carry only the *sensation* of power, "Ideas of Truth," however, are associated with real *estimates* of power. These involve some knowledge of technical difficulties, for example, the greatness of conception in relation to the slightness of means or media. Hence no real "Idea of Power" is ever connected with imitative art <sup>1</sup>

"Ideas of Imitation" are also limited in their substance they apply only to material things But "Ideas of Truth" may consist in the statements of emotion, in impressions and thoughts as well Truths, moreover, may be stated by signs and symbols in which there is no image or likeness of anything,<sup>2</sup> but imitation requires likeness of things This is one reason why true art may represent great things but imitative merely small. True art may break through the ordinary show of the world and convey "uncorrupted truth" (a phrase which indicates to what degree Ruskin's thought is following neo-classical tradition) <sup>3</sup>

Now Reynolds, as I have shown, developed from various sources the most popular form of neo-classic theory of representation Art was understood to imitate nature in the sense of representing its general truths, not its particular, for these were accidental and ephemeral The slavish imitative school, as distinct from the school of grand stylists, was believed to have attained merely the imitation of the insignificant The difference between the two seemed to Reynolds to consist more in content or inner form than in method To Ruskin, however, the artistic attitude which dictated the method was paramount and hence method itself was significant This is why in his introduction Ruskin fell in line with Reynolds in condemning the literal doctrine of Imitation, but in later pages of the same volume found himself in sharp disagreement with Reynolds' arguments

A reverence for what really is—for truth—seemed to

Ruskin the great artistic necessity His conviction remains latent in the detailed exposition of these early chapters but appears later on as an explicit criterion in his criticism. It is upon this basis that his sharpest analysis of imitative art rests Pictures of an imitative sort, he says, may seem to gather more material truths than other types of art in which the imagination has stronger play, but upon examination these material truths will be found to consist only in the most obvious perceptions, chiefly those of space and projection The accuracy achieved is superficial, the essential form and color are deceptions People are deceived because there are enough facts for recognition, but recognition for the concern of art is the lowest possible standard of reality

Ruskin points to examples from some of the best painters "For instance, the quay on which the figure is sitting, with one hand to his eyes, in Claude's *Seaport* in the National Gallery, is egregiously out of perspective The eye of this artist, with all his study, had thus not acquired the power of taking cognizance of the apparent form even of a simple parallelopiped . it is the same with regard to colour If we were to paint a tree sky-blue, or a dog rose-pink, the discernment of the public would be keen enough to discover the falsehood, but, so that there be just so much approach to truth of colour as may come up to the common idea of it in men's minds, that is to say, if the trees be all bright green, and flesh unbroken buff, and ground unbroken brown, though all the real and refined truths of colour be wholly omitted, or rather defied and contradicted, there is yet quite enough for all purposes of imitation " The deeper but more characteristic truths of form which genuinely distinguish the object are not there; it is upon these, not upon popular recognition, that the truth of art depends.

The effects of true and imitative art upon the beholder



vary greatly. In receiving ideas of imitation, says Ruskin, the mind is "wholly occupied with finding out that what has been suggested to it is not what it appears to be," hence, the pleasure is derived from the discovery of falsehood. But in receiving ideas of truth, the mind "dwells on its own conception of the fact or form or feeling stated"; it is "regardless" of the signs or symbols by which the notion of it has been conveyed. Thus "Ideas of Truth" are the foundation, and "Ideas of Imitation" the destruction of all art. "the word *Truth*, as applied to art, signifies the faithful statement either to the mind or the senses of any fact of nature."

By observation and argument of this kind Ruskin clarified the outlines of traditional opinion concerning artistic representation. There could be no doubt where he stood concerning imitation or what he considered its vices to be. Nor was the reader left in the dark by his application of the term truth. "The faithful statement . . . of any fact of nature" was explicit definition. Yet the problem was far from solved. Was a true fact of nature the general form or the particular accident? Anyone acquainted with esthetic arguments had yet to be shown. Ruskin was moving headlong into difficulty.

Part of the delight gained by the young theorist in these sharp declarations arose from the fact that he knew he was hitting a controversial point. There is a certain glamour about the pronouncements of this completely unknown and just-graduated "graduate of Oxford" that later assertions in the same key lack completely. It is not merely that in later years the hero became the dictator, but that the actual danger of controversy into which he plunged in this first volume gave him brilliance of conviction which the later years of authority too often tarnished with prejudice, ostentation and insult.

"Ideas of Beauty," his fourth category, reflect most distinctly two diverse elements in the complex tradition which preceded Ruskin. The neo-classicism of the eighteenth century and the literary doctrines of the late seventeenth all held that the chief end of art is to please. This, however, was combined with the assumption that fine art is essentially instructive, elevating and capable of leading men to virtue. Didactic generalizations, as I have shown, penetrate the systems of many theorists who followed the pleasure doctrine, who defined beauty in terms of sensation. Du Bos, Crousaz, Hutcheson, Burke and Opie each, in one way or another, combine a theory of pleasure-sensation with an ideal of moral improvement. In view of this fact, it is interesting to discover that Ruskin's scheme separates the instructive and literary elements in art from those more properly to be regarded as beautiful. As his system develops, this separation is not sustained, but at the initial stage of plotting out his theoretical divisions he distinctly limits "Ideas of Beauty" to the sphere of emotion.

His definition of beauty undeniably points to sensation as its base. "Any object is beautiful in some degree which can give us pleasure." Pleasure, however, is not to be described by a hedonistic classification; it is manifest in certain moral modes varying with the degrees of beauty possible to our experience. Why we receive pleasure from some objects and from others none is not to be asked. The Lord God has so made us. Yet, Ruskin is certain that we do not receive pleasure because beautiful objects are symbolic of intellectual prototypes. Such symbolism does not fit the real facts either of ancient or modern art. Rather do we receive pleasure without any "knowing element, just as we get sensual pleasure from a rose. . . ."

At the start this looks very much like a materialistic

theory based, in spite of his denial, on a kind of hedonistic doctrine, with no allowance whatever for ideal or spiritual elements in beauty. Ruskin proceeds, however, to declare that every object in nature is capable of conveying beauty in greater or less degree (he denied the literalness of this proposition in 1883) and that every species of natural beauty has therefore its own potential degree (a parallel to a geological classification learned at Oxford, not many years before). Such assertions betray his intention of establishing some criteria for beauty, not in sensation, but in objective nature.

Yet, in apprehending great or noble ideas of beauty he perceives nothing intellectual, for in the pleasure derived from beautiful objects he denies all exertion of the intellect. The pleasure is first sensation, then more than sensation, rising to "High emotions." Even these high emotions seem to him non-intellectual, for Ruskin argues that if any person can answer why he likes this or that beautiful thing, he is receiving more than an idea of beauty, probably an idea of "fitness," "propriety" or "relation."

The faculty that perceives the distinctions in degrees of beauty, that can even perceive the noblest or most valuable ideas, is ordinarily called taste. It belongs fundamentally to our moral nature which, in its purity and perfection, finds these material sources of beauty attractive. Thus the faculty of taste must be distinguished from judgment. The latter, Ruskin says, is a general term applied to every kind of subject, expressing definite action of the intellect. Taste, however, is an "instinctive," an "instant preference" without obvious reasons.

There is no part of Ruskin's theoretical venture which is more entertaining as theory than the chapters on Beauty developed from this formal beginning. They contain the most penetrating psychological observations, the

most surprising rights parallel to the most incredible and farcical wrongs. In the above, for example, one discovers only a hint of the traditional combination of sensation-theory with moral idealism; but the later chapters expand the hint to an explicit emotional dualism. It is the ancient doctrine of faculties, and no failure in Ruskin's classification, which leads him later into paradoxes, for the doctrine of faculties had put sentiments and pleasure under the moral faculty. There, for Ruskin and for his period, these embarrassing constituents of beauty remained

The eighteenth century critic had assumed that art pleases in order to elevate or instruct. But Ruskin penetrated into this common sense assumption, he tried to separate the emotional or what we should now call esthetic values from the more informatively didactic. He divided the moral benefit of art into three great groups: factual, rightly pleasurable and intellectual or spiritual. All three he considered to fall under the moral faculty; but his effort to separate "Ideas of Beauty" from "Ideas of Relation" amounts to a distinct, though perhaps unconscious, criticism of the loose coupling of these elements in eighteenth century theory.

To cut away from "Ideas of Beauty" the extraneous literary, instructive, intellectual and religious matter that had accumulated through the neo-Platonic and the empirical explanations necessitated his fifth category. Its very reason for being is that "Ideas of Relation" garner everything that will not strictly fit into the foregoing divisions. The category's importance lies in the opportunity it allows for keeping "Ideas of Truth" strictly visual or perceptively focused upon nature and "Ideas of Beauty" purely emotional. "Ideas of Relation," then, are all those "which are subjects of distinct intellectual perception and action" or, more simply, thoughts

But thoughts are often the noblest elements in the artistic experience. In detail they are everything producing expression, sentiment, character, everything relating to the conception of the subject represented and to the congruity of its parts. They are not supposed to include the elements of plastic form which might be said to relate to "the congruity of parts," and thus "enhance beauty by known laws of composition"; rather, they are those ideas contributing to the congruity "by particular application, requiring distinct thought to discover and enjoy." Such ideas, for example, are the conceptions of character in portraiture, and of sentiment and facial or bodily expression in any figure painting, of poetical mood in landscape, of heroism and moral example in historical painting, in short, of instructive idealism or intellectual sentiment in any kind of art. It is by these ideas that art with all its complicated sources of pleasure most fully bears out the analogy to language.

As one may readily see, the scope of this classification is very large, involving what may be loosely called literary elements, spiritual qualities, and most mystifying of all, imaginative elements. In Ruskin's introduction, the latter are not included in "Ideas of Relation," but, because they are so closely allied to what is discussed later as the "formal" concepts of art, they inevitably appear in the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* under this category. It took Ruskin some years to realize that these plastic elements of composition, invention and chiaroscuro were definitely involved with the expression of imaginative thoughts or ideals; that they, in spite of his early insistence, were one type of "Ideas of Relation."

The sensational elements in color, line and space, however, led him in the second volume of *Modern Painters* to treat plastic elements in art under the category of "Ideas of Beauty." The difficulty, therefore, of explaining

their associative character under "Ideas of Relation" in the last volume was embarrassing. He never fully resolved this confusion, for he never attempted to reorganize the formal classification established in the introduction. But he paid less and less attention to his artificial structure, he pursued rather the more important problems of truth, beauty and morality in their relation to art. It is under these heads, therefore, that his theory of art is to be most clearly comprehended.

#### SPECIFIC SOURCES

Such arbitrary division of art into five distinct categories can scarcely pass unquestioned. The inevitable "Why did he do that?" must have occurred to many a reader's mind. The answer is to be found in the very nature of the traditions in esthetics before him. He had read just enough to become the victim of conflicting tendencies. In the University he acquired a little formal philosophy from an indifferent reading of Aristotle's *Ethics* and from Locke's monumental *Essay*. These works were the chief influences upon his general "lay-out." Aristotle gave him the notion of faculties, if not the term, and Locke sustained, when Ruskin came to psychological considerations, the use of the term.

Now Locke accounts for all cognitive activity by the fact that faculties are inherent in a self-conscious being. Ruskin's division of them into intellectual, the moral and the contemplative ("Theoria") is his own adaptation of Aristotle, later amplified and enriched by his reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*. The term *Idea* used in these classifications is similarly interesting as it rises originally from a reading of Locke and takes on, in the second volume of *Modern Painters*, a Platonic connotation. To discover what Ruskin meant by it is therefore fundamental to a

comprehension of a theory in which there is so strong an emphasis upon the importance of representative fact.

"Whatever the mind perceives," said Locke, "I call idea"; and this for Ruskin is fundamental so far as the problem of representation in art is concerned. These simple ideas, or perceptions, as Locke calls them, are not to be confused with the real qualities of things outside the mind. Sensations accompanying such perception, Locke observed, were no more the exact likeness of the something outside than the names of our ideas are the exact likeness of *them*. Ruskin seems to have followed Locke's thought up to the point of calling simple perceptions ideas, but the metaphysical problem of "Reality" gave him no concern whatever, for he appears to have been unaware of it. He gives no real indication of having understood what Locke was talking about in that ornate terminology of "Nominal and Real Essence," although he does, later, mark off the province of artistic truth from that of science by a distinction between appearance and essential reality, the former being the realm of art, the latter of science. On the whole, he avoids metaphysics yet takes over a classification, a scheme, which in Locke is part of a metaphysical system. This led to difficulties which Ruskin was never to clear up.

"Ideas of Truth" remained for Ruskin very much what Locke meant by simple ideas. As applied to art, "Ideas of Truth" are the foundation material derived from sense perception. In just this way "Ideas of Beauty" correspond, without exact metaphysical precision, to Locke's "complex ideas" of modes or substances. "Ideas of Relation" (the phrase itself is taken from Locke) are the simple or complex ideas brought together either in "considering or comparing," as Locke puts it, one with another. "Ideas of Imitation" are nothing more to Ruskin than a persuasion that an image is true when it isn't;

they are derived, as I have said, from his antipathy to late eighteenth century opinions on art "Ideas of Power" he contrived to classify as a distinct kind of perception by adapting a very small part of Locke's immense and confusing chapter of the same title The logical correspondence is thus inexact and vague, but quotations from Locke point to the fact that Ruskin took for the structure of his introduction what he could comprehend and what seemed to him relevant

Ruskin's use of the term *idea* and his introductory divisions are thus unmistakably from the father of Utilitarians Yet the influence of Locke's method of investigation is astonishingly slight Many of the early empirical observations, used as postulates, give way at a later period to more seductive generalizations derived from Aristotle and from Plato. Through the theoretical arguments of the first two volumes, indeed, Ruskin habitually combines Aristotle, Locke, the Bible and Plato in confusing but earnest paragraphs The older he grew the more he preferred the oracular and prophetic manner of deduction which had been developed and lent authority by his constant reading of the Bible Thus, like most moralists arising from a similar confounding background, he is never more insecure than when he is most positive.

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## CHAPTER III

### NEW THEORIES FOR A NEW PUBLIC

#### SOCIAL CHANGES

THE first volume of *Modern Painters* was an early harvest of nineteenth century ideals. In spite of the traditional terms which the introductory chapters contained, the following pages glow with the appreciation of a fully realized, new art. For more than forty years poets had been "idealizing the real"—had been, as Fairchild says, penetrating "the natural by the supernatural. . . . to interpret life in terms of wishful emotion"<sup>1</sup> A similar reinterpretation of the world had been taking place in the fine arts, particularly in paintings. Turner had been recognized as an important modern for more than twenty-five years, and even fifty years before Ruskin's book appeared social forces had been altering the critical attitudes which I have briefly described. By 1843 the time was ripe for a new dogmatism; many questions pertaining to what was now called moral culture had become embarrassing.

Progress in scientific thought, the development of the concept of history, the increasing popular interest in external nature had inevitably confused critical points of view and introduced new problems for theorists. Changes in the social structure of England, the invention of cheaper processes of printing, the rise of the magazine, had made profitable the popularization of art on a scale unknown before; a different and larger public, led by

critics rather than by connoisseurs, was muddling what remained of eighteenth century preferences. Apparent before 1790, these changes became striking in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century; by 1840 criticism was out of line with the facts of popular taste.

The cultural expressions of an industrial middle class were becoming as certain as their control of industry. Within the second and third decades of the new century the famous reviews, the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Blackwoods*, the *Westminster* advanced their circulation by thousands, their critics led arduous lives trying to apply established principles to new poetry, fiction, architecture and painting. The dissemination of an interest in nature illustration clashed with the principles of the grand style; archaeology upset the historical prejudices of the academies, publishers, assured of the rapid growth of the reading public, encouraged unknown authors. There were a large number of people ready to listen to any message that could sanction the successful progress of new enterprise and reinterpret the cultural hopes of a new age. It was just the moment for young graduates with rhetorical gifts to publish their convictions.

The extent to which they took advantage of their opportunities is manifest in the early writings of Carlyle, Macaulay, Ruskin, Mill, Browning, Tennyson and other prophets of Victorian fame; but the prophetic tone itself is difficult for a twentieth century reader to understand unless he has some conception of the changed conditions that appear to have encouraged the new dogmatism. For this reason a brief survey of the forces which were creating new views on art may be useful to an appreciation of Ruskin's first theories.

A concern for the history rather than the mere descriptive analysis of art and architecture had become a positive influence upon criticism. One of the first evi-

dences of this interest in England is to be found in the work of James Barry, the follower of Reynolds. His criticism<sup>2</sup> of hypocritical attitudes toward art recalls the more intolerant scorn of William Blake. But Barry was neither poet nor seer, he was a professor of painting in the Royal Academy and just a little ahead of the changing views of his compatriots. He did not really break with tradition, he tried to improve and purify conventional views. He did much to stimulate a sense of historical values. Reynolds had discriminated sharply between schools, but there is no emphasis upon the historical development of these schools or the social conditions affecting the work of individual painters, there is no sign in his work of historical imagination. Barry, however, and Opie who followed him as professor of painting, possess more historical imagination than critical accuracy, even Fuseli, whose historical insight was dimmed by a passion for epigram and sententious nicety, is aware of general social distinctions in the art of different periods.

A few incidents in the growth of archaeology may suggest one cause for the development of this historical point of view. The discovery of antiquities at Herculaneum in 1709 had led to the beginning of excavations in 1738. In 1755 Johann J. Winckelmann began writing reports from Rome of their progress. These and his later writings received wide circulation on the continent and were read in England toward the end of the century. They may have become known there through the author's friendship for the poet Churchill. By 1780 the attention of English archaeologists was turned to Greece itself; the most spectacular result of this attention was the acquisition of the Elgin marbles in 1812.

The new interest in the discovery of antique treasures had a profound effect upon the criticism of art. Gradually it annihilated the factual basis for the false class-

icism which had dominated the taste of the socially elect, it suggested also that architectural research might have some practical value to the revival of Gothic building. The fanciful rococo of Strawberry Hill fell under reproach. As historical accuracy was extended to the province of painting, new books on old masters appeared, and long before 1840 architecture, sculpture and painting began to be reinterpreted in the light not only of their past glory but of their origin.<sup>3</sup> The work of R. N. Wornum, the secretary of the National Gallery, and Charles Eastlake, the keeper, are examples of the strides made in research upon the history of painting alone. By 1848, when Wornum edited the lectures of the Academicians with endless correction of their errors and unusually full historical notes, modern historical criticism of art was established in England.<sup>4</sup>

An important feature of the new historical vision, however, had been contributed by German archaeology and history. In *Geschichte der kunst des Alter-tums* (Dresden, 1764) Winckelmann rested many of his historical generalizations on an assumption that is particularly characteristic of nineteenth century English histories. He assumed that specific geographical and social conditions were responsible for the characteristics of various artistic periods. This assumption appears also in the writings of Lessing and Goethe and may owe its first exploitation to Herder; yet in a rudimentary form the idea appears in the *Reflections* of Du Bos very early in the century.<sup>5</sup> Though the notion may have reached England through the translation of Du Bos' work it is the later form of the concept in Winckelmann's history that is pertinent to nineteenth century criticism. The extension which Winckelmann gave the assumption leads directly to the theory that style may illustrate the social conditions of a people. Suggestions of this view appear in Willis' *Re-*

*marks on the Architecture of the Middle Ages*, a history which Ruskin read while at work on *The Seven Lamps*, and Ruskin was interested in the effect of climate upon style as early as 1847. His belief that art and architecture are indexes of the moral character of any given nation grew from the traditional view. The theory became popular and Pater's search for great personalities in art, in order to discover through their work the temper and spirit of an age, illustrates the lasting influence of Winckelmann's history upon English criticism.

The extension of the historical horizon, then, was a very active factor in the renovation of criticism and it had its effects upon later theory, but of equal importance was the gradual development of a different and larger public for art, consequent with the rise of the magazine in the early nineteenth century. There is little doubt that the public which appreciated art grew enormously after 1800. At the same time, families of newly made wealth and ambitious culture, rather than those of ancient lineage, became the patrons of art. The public of 1840 reading countless books and magazine articles, could scarcely be discussed in the same terms as could the public which had absorbed the wisdom of Reynolds' discourses. It is interesting to discover in letters sent to the *Times* by such men as Payne Knight, Benjamin R. Haydon and Fuseli as well as in articles by Leigh Hunt and, of course, Hazlitt, an attempt to reach a public whose taste was not definitely fixed, which was open to arguments from a variety of authorities, and which had little connection with polite society as such.

Haydon, complaining that only the nobility came to see his pictures, tried to remedy the situation by appealing to the middle class. In his open letters he bitterly attacked Payne Knight for insinuating and then declaring that the Elgin marbles were Roman copies.<sup>6</sup> Although

he was anxious that the government should put immense historical canvasses in the House of Commons, he antagonized the nobility itself by his criticism of their patronage. He complained that they cherished only portraiture. In his later years, indeed, he and the popular Fuseli extended their efforts to lecturing in other cities than London in the hope of improving the artistic character of English manufacture. The result, however, seems to have been merely the stimulated interest in the fine arts of a public which included workmen.<sup>7</sup>

The criticism of Hazlitt, Fuseli, Haydon and others is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is significant to a sketch of Ruskin's background in two ways. It carried on the general principles of Academism, the popular respect for the grand style, for Italian masters, for the French landscape of Poussin and Claude and for the portraiture of the eighteenth century English school. It also brought art into the journals and newspapers. Claude and Savator and Gaspar Poussin had long been popular. Hazlitt particularly invigorated the appreciation of Nicholas Poussin. His articles for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1824 on *The Character of Sir Joshua Reynolds* and *An Inquiry whether the Fine Arts are promoted by Academies* stimulated among an increasingly large public an interest in English tradition and English academic attitudes.<sup>8</sup> His part, moreover, in defending the reputation of a new school of art, called the British Institution, against a violent and somewhat scurrilous attack by a group of jealous "R A's" who remained anonymous, was, according to Haydon, strong, far-sighted and bold.<sup>9</sup>

Haydon, while attacking on personal grounds the particular group in control of the Royal Academy exhibitions, was, after all, not radical in his assumptions. His interest lay in historical painting, which he justified on a curious blend of naturalistic, academic, didactic and

moral grounds. He aided greatly in popularizing the Elgin marbles which he worshiped and from which he had his students draw, he also stimulated the interest in anatomical study, actually dissecting cadavers in order to perfect his own knowledge. It was Haydon, moreover, long before Ruskin began to write, who called attention to the dramatic virtues of certain canvasses of early Italians whom Ruskin is often considered to have rediscovered. It was Haydon, too, who caught the attention, sometimes with unhappy results to himself, of the prominent literary figures of the period<sup>10</sup>

With the increased notoriety of painters and painting, taste itself from 1815 to 1840 was undergoing a slow but certain change. The tradition of the grand style in painting and sculpture had reigned supreme for about seventy-five years, it was now being undermined by a combination of forces, apparent first in social and architectural manifestations and ultimately breaking down the artificial canons of good taste in the more special arts. The archaeological discoveries of the eighteenth century in Italy had produced fashionable movements away from the baroque orders of the late renaissance toward a severe simplicity. Revivals of neo-Greek and neo-Roman elements appeared in the last half of the century. But at the same time counter reactions toward a flamboyant and fanciful Gothic had captured the attention of romantic spirits such as Walpole, Battey Langley and Beckford. But the rise of a classical archaeology soon had a parallel in the development of a more learned criticism of Gothic forms. The influence of this criticism upon actual building was sporadic and slow, but particularly after 1820 the results of study were manifest in new churches and public buildings. Controversy over technical issues reached the magazines, and historical opinion was refined by more learned and accurate histories of Gothic origins.

Before 1820 Gothic building was practically confined to private houses, the admiration for it was, according to Kenneth Clarke, "only common among the upper classes."<sup>11</sup> Between 1818 and 1833, however, the government, convinced of the comparative economy of Gothic over Grecian styles, erected 174 Gothic churches. The magazine editors so popularized the criticism of these new monuments that one of the liveliest discussions of architectural and esthetic principles that ever occurred in England arose over the choice of Gothic for the new Houses of Parliament. The old classical theory of imitation was revived by the opponents of Gothic, while the medievalists themselves descended so far from the sublime as to use the same authority. They argued that if Greek pillars were imitated from "hewn trunks" the Gothic forms followed "the avenues of living trees"<sup>12</sup>

#### NATURE RE-DISCOVERED

The important fact, however, is not the appearance of this or that vogue or revival, it is the growth of an architectural and esthetic consciousness in a middle class which was, by the inevitable revolution of industry, taking the political and financial control of England from country squires and lords of the land. The new industrial development, with its inevitable revolution in the habits of life and its shift in the balance of social prestige and economic power, had unloosed the currents of individualism and romantic speculation which had been restricted by the aristocratic stability of the old society.

In art as well as in politics the rigid forms of privilege and mechanical order gave way before the principles of *laissez faire*. An appeal to natural freedom made popular the political liberalism which abolished the corn laws, in artistic taste naturalism destroyed the barriers of a



grand style For nature, in both its human and external features, appeared in a new light. Not only had Rousseau asserted his faith in a natural, rational individual, but he had popularized instinctive sentiments The work of Crabbe, Cowper and Burns had carried literary imagination into provinces of realistic as well as fanciful speculation, their interest in the village and the common man had extended the boundaries of respectable, literary subject matter Poets as serious as Blake and Wordsworth, as flippant as William Combe, protested against what they considered to be the formal falsehoods of a previous literary generation.<sup>13</sup> The Della Cruscan mingled ideals of political freedom with their versified expositions of the "equal feelings" of mankind The new though still minor poets felt that they had re-discovered human nature; they sounded every depth of individualistic sentiment and set all sails for a freedom which could blow the natural man, as Crane Brinton says, "into cotton manufacturing or into pantheism."<sup>14</sup>

The novelists at the end of the century not only followed but outwrote the poets Mrs Inchbald, Mrs Smith, Mrs Opie, Miss Edgeworth, Bage, Holcroft and Cumberland, not to mention Godwin, the arch-utopian, all "shaded off" their fiction "into educational writing" Their works were widely read and led to the popularization of what Canning called "the new morality" But they did not merely concern themselves with moral nature and the somewhat vague ideals of equality, philanthropy and natural goodness Like the poets, they fanned an immense enthusiasm for external nature They and the writers of hair-raising, terror novels filled pages with descriptions of grotesque scenery, wild and extravagantly unbeautiful.

An interest in the poetic aspect of flowers, woodland, lake and hill had since 1740 remained the comparatively

minor enthusiasm of a few poets. Though Addison and a few others expressed an interest in the rugged beauty of the Alps, the English gentleman, after crossing these mountains on his grand tour, was generally more impressed with their dangers and discomforts than with their splendor<sup>15</sup>. But by 1800 leisure and wealth had encouraged the new bourgeoisie to make use of the increased facilities of travel which the peaceful era of eighteenth century life had developed. They began to move about England in coaches of their own furnishing, they became aware of its country, its castles and its magnificent cathedrals; they began to realize that even its wild regions were "sublime" and its ruined abbeys "picturesque". Through the last two decades of the eighteenth century natural scenery was unrolled before an educated public as a fresh world of inspiration and delight.

Travel literature in the form of published journals with labored descriptions of foreign scenery had also become a fashion, for travel itself had been made easier. Some of these records are mainly sentimental, but others, like the poet Gray's *Journal of a Visit to the Lakes* (1769) and William Gilpin's *Observations relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1778) or his *Forest Scenery* (1791), stimulated an interest not only in wild scenery but in natural history. Dr. Thomas Twining (a friend of Dr. Burney and translator of Aristotle's *Poetics*) had much to say in his correspondence of the moods brought to him by nature, and the sense of "benevolence" the open country gave him. A regard for the emotional excitement engendered by "picturesque" landscape rapidly takes hold of the popular imagination and is combined, as in Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1798), with the then progressive natural sciences.

The cult of the picturesque reached its height from

more than one angle Landscape architects such as Brown, Price and Payne Knight were to quarrel endlessly over the limits of terms, pious scientists over the proper principles of nature herself Poetry, fashion, travel, science are blended in a new romance, and all are justified, "ennobled" and popularized by religious doctrines similar to those of the seventeenth century The fashionable vogue itself is in disgrace after 1800, but travel continues, religion interprets, science grows Increasing numbers of the successful middle class develop a half religious attitude toward nature which characterizes a new epoch White's reflections are rich in the minute description of animal and vegetable species on the one hand and pious appreciation of God's creations on the other. His book went through six editions before 1830.

Among the influences which changed artistic taste and brought new esthetic theories to light, the literary turn to nature was by far the most profound It explains more than half of Ruskin's early popularity as well as the fashions in painting from 1840 to 1860 The vogue of the picturesque was merely one phase, and that a limited one, of the new enthusiasm for the unarranged glory of wild places The serious, almost religious regard for landscape which swept over England and America before 1850 was by no means the superimposed preference of an aristocratic society, it was indigenous to a new industrial, pious and ambitious bourgeoisie

Coincident with travel and travel books there had come a demand for pictures of famous places and famous castles Magazines between 1820 and 1830 are full of the reviews of these books which contained descriptions of English and continental scenery, of architectural monuments, of peasant life. The sudden and stupendous success of the Waverley novels with their pages of faith-

ful portrayal of the northern hills and the northern manners, the gradual spread of garden books and the popularity of informal, as against formal, landscape gardening encouraged naturalistic interests among successful middle class families throughout England. Their pleasure in nature had little kinship with the eighteenth century geometrical gardens, their interest in landscape, therefore, bore little similarity to the eighteenth century enthusiasm for Claude, Poussin and Salvator. Hazlitt and others, to be sure, continued the appreciation of Poussin and Claude, but between 1780 and 1820 travel literature itself brought about the conditions for the development of a new art, and between 1820 and 1840 progressive citizens were forming their taste in landscape from more vivid sources than the doctrines of their critics.

To fill the illustrative requirements of the travel books there arose in the latter decades of the eighteenth century a class of artisans called "topographers" who drew for the publishers "portraits of places" or "scenes" in ink or hard crayon with washes of color to distinguish near and far distances. Some of these scenes were engraved, but most remained merely "stained drawings." A few of these topographical draughtsmen became very well known for their special characteristics. Such, for example, was George Moreland (1763-1804), whose pretty peasants and pink pigs, attractive trees and bits of sunlight over broken ground appeared in hundreds of drawings in the last thirty years of the century. Such too were Alexander (1715-86) and Couzens (1752-99) who, with Sam Scott (1710-72), "continued the idea of the 'topographical tramp'"<sup>16</sup> These eighteenth century men had a host of imitators during the late decades of the century; few, however, were considered artists by the public. They remained merely the slaves of a fashion. They

were, nevertheless, the fathers of English water color painting, heralds of the new English landscape.

For a century academic taste had been definitely against naturalistic landscape Reynolds and Gainsborough, although they introduced nature backgrounds into their figure paintings, and although they indulged occasionally in landscape as such, were definitely and consciously following the rules of the grand style. Gainsborough himself is said seldom to have sold a landscape<sup>17</sup> Though Titian had made a radical turn toward naturalistic truth, the English connoisseurs esteemed the color and the tone of his landscape backgrounds above the imitative elements Rembrandt and Rubens seemed to them to have continued the tradition of dramatic lighting and noble composition, and the Caraccis, the Poussins, Claude Lorraine and Salvator in the seventeenth century had all achieved slightly varying compromises with nature and classical elegance For the eighteenth century English artist a certain standard of magnificence had to be kept, a certain forced exaggeration of tone and dramatic lighting Truth of natural appearances was not the primary requisite Wilson, who gave up figure painting for landscape and failed to make enough of a compromise, starved for his devotion to nature

In Hazlitt's early art criticisms the interest in landscape is well marked He respects, however, the great canvasses of Poussin and Claude and has little praise for the independent experiments of Wilson "All is loose and general in his work," says Hazlitt, "the outlines of his landscapes are inaccurate, the perspective bad " Because of the tradition Hazlitt was prejudiced he admired the grotesque liberties of Salvator Rosa but condemned the free technique of Gainsborough<sup>18</sup> Fuseli, who remained professor of painting in the Royal Academy till 1825, and who had a large following among the readers

of criticism, scorned "delineations of a given spot", called them "mere views" and "map work" and held even more rigidly than had Barry<sup>19</sup> some thirty years before to the rules of the "grand" tradition. But the travel books with better and better illustrations stimulated the interest of a new public so that, by 1815, a new group of "real artists" had made their mark almost entirely through their landscape painting.<sup>20</sup> John Crome, Constable, Cotman, Girtin and Turner were being talked of by independent connoisseurs of advanced taste. The success of these early men is interesting for the fact that they received either no formal training at all or were apprenticed to "topographical draughtsmen" or the "drawing teachers" which the vogue of picturesque views at the end of the century had encouraged.

It had long been fashionable in the upper class of London society for young ladies to learn to draw from nature and to wash their drawings with sepia or the simplest monochrome tints.<sup>21</sup> The custom had spread, as the novels of Jane Austen indicate, to the young middle class ladies all over the country. Price's *An Essay on the Picturesque* had appeared in 1794. Books on sketching, carefully prepared for the amateur, began to appear after 1800, such as J. Roberts' *Lessons in Watercolor* (1801) or J. W. Alston's *Hints to a Practitioner in Landscape* (1804). By the eighteen thirties these treatises had become more numerous and had been extended to cover the technique of painting flowers.<sup>22</sup> They contained practical devices for rendering type forms of trees, ferns and blossoms as well as standard recipes for water and sky effects. There was even a magazine of amateur nature sketching called *The Landscape Annual* (1829-38). It was the amateur, not the Royal Academy student, who loved and observed nature.

Crome himself was an amateur in fine art, he never

painted in oil to sell. He made his living as a drawing master in Norwich.<sup>23</sup> His genuinely inspired work in water-color and oil was done entirely for his own diversion. Cotman first developed his strong decorative water-color technique from the already established tradition of wash drawing.<sup>24</sup> Constable learned to draw and wash faithfully from nature long before he went to the Academy schools or thought of exhibiting in oils,<sup>25</sup> and Girtin and Turner earned their first livelihood as "topographical draughtsmen" in well established firms.<sup>26</sup> An example of the relation which their work bore to the topographical illustrations which preceded them is Hazlitt's comment as late as 1816 that Turner's landscapes were "nothing but stained water-colour drawings loaded with oil."<sup>27</sup>

But the sale of illustrated books increased, within a few years of Hazlitt's comment young illustrators were themselves selling landscapes in oil for round figures. The significance of the connection is very great, for the origin of the new art conditioned its character. Though many men went far beyond the limits of the "stained drawing," though the efforts of Girtin and Cotman turned water-color painting into a powerful art, though Constable and Turner broke radically from the limitations of the grand style in oil landscapes, still the illustrative intent remained predominant with all of them, if for no other reason than that illustration was for many years the chief means of earning their bread and butter.<sup>28</sup> However brilliant their poetical effects of light, atmosphere and storm clouds, however subtle the compositions they devised, there was always the understanding on the part of their public that a picture was a picture of a certain place and, even more important, that this was the way that place or that tree or that castle looked.

In such a way were the academic assumptions of the

eighteenth century modified, unconsciously they were transformed into justifications for a new landscape Art was, as it were, brought to the attention of the nation rather than of one caste, the bourgeoisie were gradually being made aware of the fact that the fine landscapes were necessary to that culture which social ambitions demanded they should achieve Religious subjects were still popular, but for the picture buying public of the early Victorian period religion and nature became very nearly inseparable.

Even Ruskin's father, the child of an old Edinburgh family, highly educated in the polite arts, took pains that his son should receive at an early age not the traditional instruction in drawing recommended since the days of Castiglioni and Henry Peacham for the proper education of a gentleman, but training in the drawing of landscape and architecture from newly recognized masters Though he had had his portrait painted by Raeburn, he made canny efforts to acquire, with an eye for an excellent bargain, the works of an artist whom we should now call "a coming modern " It was his sincere love of natural scenery, of travel and the poetical illusions which nature could so beneficently bestow that directed his attention to Turner rather than to the enormous historical canvases of Opie, Fuseli and Haydon, the costly portraits of Lawrence or the increasingly popular genre studies of Wilkie, Leslie and many others.

The long admiration for the grand style thus gradually changed into an appreciation of landscape and the faithful record of scenes from lives of simple people Instead of elegance or "classical repose" the purchasers of new paintings demanded a touching story or a true description of the evanescent beauty in the wild regions they had encountered on their travels By 1840 the revolution in



taste had been securely established among independent spirits like Ruskin's father

Criticism, however, lagged far behind the press had become frightened by Turner's latest impressions, there was no new theory to explain or justify the confusing combination of literalism, idealization and willful technique in the new paintings, even the popular genre studies were still discussed in terms that scarcely fitted the facts of their subjects, their composition or their manner. Painters less courageous than Turner were still trying to adapt new matter and genuinely poetic conceptions to old academic rules. In this advance of practice over understanding the young Ruskin found his opportunity. He felt the demand for truth but he perceived the ghosts of eighteenth century tradition still dominating academic taste and esthetic principles. He therefore set about telling the public just what truth in art really was

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE CASE FOR TRUTH

#### TRUE REPRESENTATION

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS once referred to drawing, modelling and using colors as a language through which the artist must learn to express himself<sup>1</sup> Ruskin caught the suggestion of Reynold's figure but changed its emphasis Between 1840 and 1846 he was not interested in self-expression, he was eager to find out what artistic truth was He knew that the value of Turner's paintings for him lay in their power to convey true things that he had only half seen Art is a language? Yes! But as the value of spoken language lies in what is said so art's value must lie in the ideas it communicates Here Ruskin found his first principle

Artistic truth, therefore, rests in "the faithful statement" of ideas The source of the ideas in art is nature, but nature understood in a larger sense than that which Sir Joshua and his period had conceived, nature enlarged by increased travel, new science, poetry, social theory and introspection One may thus discover in art thoughts as well as facts; moral emotions as well as simple ideas Truth then really enters into a consideration of each type of "Ideas" which art carries, but these Ruskin had cast into a formal scheme Briefly reinterpreting this scheme, thoughts correspond to "Ideas of Relation," moral emotions to "Beauty" and true and false expressions to "Ideas of Power" and "Ideas of Imitation" respectively Facts—

at this time most important to Ruskin, because his first volume was to deal primarily with landscape and the theoretical nature of artistic representation—are the so-called “Ideas of Truth”

But Ruskin’s formal scheme was not consistently followed beyond the second volume of *Modern Painters*; he did not therefore apply the concept of truth to each of these formal categories. A canon of truth appears in his discussion of imagination and fancy, in his analysis of skill and in his most complex moral and religious investigations, but the concept appears always to refer to the truth or falsehood of apprehending facts of appearance. In reference to landscape (from which he chose illustrations for the theories in his first volume) the consistent connotation of the term truth is explicit: truth consists in “the faithful statement either to the mind or the senses of any fact of nature.” So it is used in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, and such is its connotation in the fifth volume where Ruskin notes that the first division of his work was concerned with the question of “how far art may be consistent with physical or material facts.”<sup>2</sup> Years later (1870), in reference to figure painting, sculpture and even architecture he asserts that the finest models of art are “the truest, simplest and usefulest,” when they are the most faithful statements of facts.

The theoretical doctrines which Ruskin developed from his struggle with the problem of representation in painting were never forgotten. His initial appreciation of landscape colors his whole theoretical system. The early theories tend over and over again to throw Ruskin’s emphasis on the side of objective truth instead of subjective inspiration in art, though it is obvious that there were other forces pulling him in an opposite direction. Fact or material substance, rather than ideal essence, is his characteristic standard. Seeing true is for him the

*sine qua non* of fine art His early passion for landscape disappears in his second volume and in his architectural books only to be revived in the later volumes of *Modern Painters* Despite many other real studies, it is on landscape and landscape painters that he makes his most astute observations throughout his career, just as in the writings on political economy his shrewdest comments arise from consideration of actual situations in the world of material fact

If, then, art is founded upon the sense experience of the external world and the term truth is used in general to refer to material fact, and "Ideas of Truth" (following Locke) are "simple ideas or perceptions of sense," Ruskin's first esthetic question concerns the nature of representation The old problem of Greek esthetics, the connection of art with nature, is revived, Ruskin's enters the inevitable and eternal conflict between the belief that the real is an intellectual form and the conviction that it is the sensuous fact It is difficult to say how well he knew Aristotle's *Poetics*, for in *Praeterita* he says that even the *Ethics* used in Oxford courses was only partially digested But he was well aware of the literal interpretation of the term imitation as copy, and stood firmly in sympathy with the protest delivered by such romantics as Young and Blake against academic imitation, he clamored as loudly as they for "original composition" He was, like Reynolds and Coleridge,<sup>3</sup> "disgusted with the deception" of literal copies of nature

By 1840 it was not particularly original to feel strongly on this subject Literary naturalism had encouraged the discovery of one or another ideal truth in nature, whether it turned out to be naively mystical as in Wordsworth's poetry or intricately intellectual as in Coleridge's theories But Ruskin follows, in his analysis of "representative truth," neither Wordsworth's nor Coleridge's arguments.

He insists, on the one hand, that art should represent things as they are, for he avoids the obvious Aristotelian idea of representing things better than they are, on the other hand, he escapes the fetters of literal reality by a kind of casuistry all his own.

First, Ruskin approaches the problem with definitions concerning the uses of the terms true and false, which lead to an important distinction between artistic and scientific truth. Second, he proceeds by arguments adapted from Locke to disagree with Reynolds and the eighteenth century doctrine of general form.

"The words true and false," he says, "are only to be rightly used while the picture is considered as a statement of facts. We speak" (as he did all too often in a most confusing manner) "of false line or color, not that they can in themselves be false, but they become so when they convey a statement that they resemble something that they do not resemble." And again, he says more plainly, "the use of true and false applied to things is inaccurate, the falseness of a false rose is not in the rose, but in the person who states, or induces the belief that it is a rose."<sup>4</sup> Faithfulness then, in the sense of accuracy, is the essence of true representation. But neither faithfulness nor accuracy implies copy, for copy suggested to Ruskin only a superficial resemblance, accuracy connoted a more profound visual analysis.

He had studied some science in Oxford; his enthusiasm for the sharp perceptions of the naturalist thus encouraged him to dwell at length upon the importance of visual accuracy. Yet he does his best not to confuse the intentions of science with art.<sup>5</sup> Both science and art, he says, are equally concerned with truth, but science is concerned with the truth of essence and art with the truth of aspect. Science "deals with things in themselves, and art exclusively with things as they affect the human sense

and the human soul " "Science has to do with facts, art with phenomena " The two are largely distinguishable in methods of operation, the one knows and the other creates And thus phenomena, or appearances, are useful to science only as they lead to facts, and facts are useful to art only as they lead to appearances

This distinction is one of common sense and is adequate to most of Ruskin's uses But there are points at which he needed a more philosophical theory The relation of the problem of representation to the problem of beauty is one of these, another appears in the relation of natural facts to ethics and a third in the relation of facts and morals to true artistic representation But Ruskin had no knowledge of metaphysics and little but contempt for the subtler branches of philosophy He avoids considering the metaphysical question of reality and shies away from the difficult esthetic considerations that so delighted the German idealists and Coleridge The world of appearance for Ruskin was neither metaphysically subjective nor objective it was a common sense world, it was there to look at

With an amateur's enthusiasm for geology and botany Ruskin grew out of sympathy with the progressive science of his age As he grew older he gave way to petulant denunciations encouraged by his intimate Carlyle He remained indifferent to the advance of geology and the later discoveries in the origin of biological species What fascinated him was mere descriptive analysis of plants and minerals, and for many years he believed this knowledge useful to the artist But he could never find any use for the descriptive anatomy of the human form Yet, in spite of the inconsistency in his approval of the dissection of plants and stones and his violent condemnation of surgical dissection and vivisection, he manages to sustain his views by technical arguments that appear very reason-

able His strictures were a valuable antidote to the exaggerated anatomical discipline for art students recommended by Sir Charles Bell's *Anatomy of Expression* and the lectures of B. R. Haydon

Prejudice, however, founded on the most sentimental grounds, inspired impassioned pleas for "the right sort of truth" which art alone could give He would have had an excellent point if he had argued only for poetic versus anatomical truth But Ruskin seldom escaped over-emphasis. instead of justifying on esthetic grounds what he liked to call "the Biography" not the "Anatomy" of plants and animals, he often attempted to justify pictures which represented animals and plants by their instructive information In trying to encourage art of the right sort he often revealed his sentimental bias and his actual ignorance of Oriental art he says, for example, "What the Greeks did for the horse, and what, as far as regards domestic and expressional character, Landseer has done for the dog and the deer, remains to be done by art for nearly all other animals of high organization "

But such careless generalization did not really obscure his first encounter with the esthetic problem which the eighteenth century had considered itself to have settled and the Romantic poets and travelers of the new century had unconsciously revived A popular demand for truth had been expressed by romantic intellectuals, and Ruskin was carrying this demand into a theory of art Seeing, he said, is no simple matter People differ greatly in their ability to apprehend what is around them The degrees of ignorance of external nature which we find, for example, in our friends, arise not so much from a lack of knowledge as from a lack of "bodily sensibility to color and form—intimately connected with that higher sensibility—the chief spring of poetry."

Knowledge about the external world, as he had read in



Locke, is often misleading in itself. "The Child, if asked to draw the corner of a house, will lay down something like a letter T. He has no conception that the two lines of the roof, which he knows to be level, produce on his eye the impression of a slope." Knowledge often inhibits honest perception. Knowledge, moreover, in the sense of recognition, is not only often inaccurate but impotent: an observer may recognize the child's house as an imperfect house and still be unable to better it much. The mere acquiescence of recognizing a representation is thus no judgment of the amount of truth it carries. So, in art, that sort of imitation which produces merely a high degree of recognition is not at all the same as representation which defines objects characteristically, as they exist there and now.<sup>6</sup> For the artist mere recognition is useless.

Seeing is thus complicated by the nature of the human mechanism, but it is even further complicated by the nature of the external world. Nature is infinitely various and constantly changing. What every sincere artist seems to be seeking, or should be seeking is "the constant character—the ideal form—hinted at by all, yet assumed by none." Ruskin, assured by the poets he had read, by his own intimate acquaintance with the wilds of Scotland and Switzerland and by the little Plato he remembered, never doubted for a moment that such a constant character does exist amid the external flux of appearance. It was all very well to insist that art is concerned with appearances variable, particular and changing, but true art must also be concerned with appearances which are constant and ideal, for these are the truths important to man, to the life of his soul. Somehow the soul of a painting must be related to its facts.

If one had pointed out to Ruskin that the variability in human sense impressions and the relativity of physical forces argued for anything but an absolute or permanent

aspect of the universe, Ruskin would no doubt have dismissed the argument with a gesture. His assurance arose from something more instinctively human than reason, more powerful even than facts themselves. For Ruskin's faith was formed long before he had read Plato, before he ever set eyes upon a system of formal psychological principles or a classification of natural species. It was rooted deeply and ineradicably in spiritual truths expounded to him from the Bible at his mother's knee.

The rational defense of this faith in the face of facts furnished him by his own observation took the shape of a dizzying ascent from Locke to Plato by the most fanciful metaphysical steps. Locke's formal analysis of the nature of the human understanding gave him the doctrine of primary and secondary qualities in objects. Form, or as Locke puts it, "bulk, figure, number, situation, and motion or rest of their solid parts" is primary, it is a quality of essence, of reality (though of nominal, not real, essence), all other objective qualities, such as color, heat, smell, taste, etc., are secondary. They arise from a power in the object to affect our sense, or from a power which can cause a change in another object, making it seem different to us than it did before.<sup>7</sup>

Apparently ignorant of the fact that this doctrine had been severely criticized, Ruskin applied it literally to art and upon it based his first analysis of artistic truth. It is clear, he thought, that form or the primary quality is the thing that distinguishes one species from another and one object from another. Thus, it is form in painting that gives specific truth. The secondary qualities of color, light and shade are variable and illusory, for they are merely powers of influence which are incompletely characteristic of any two objects that are affecting one another. They seem equally characteristic of the person perceiving and the object perceived, the case of two people receiving a

different scent from the same flower obviously concerns nerves as well as particles of flower. Thus he declared, "we are correct in saying, it is a power in us to perceive, as much as in the object to impress"

Primary qualities, however, are characteristic only of the body in which they are inherent; they are the most important truths concerning that body, because they tell what it is, not what it can do. Form is always clear and distinct, and may override, when light and shade are involved, the illusory distinctions of color. Form, then, tells most about the object, it is the source of truth. Yet the truth that form gives is not anatomical, but "historical" or "biographical" as it implies the past or future states of the object and points to—and this is the important function—the ideal state of the object. This constitutes its value to art. Truths of chiaroscuro are next in importance as they are most closely related to form, and truths of color are least important of all, as they are the least distinctive and most variable and illusory.

The precarious logic of all this is sufficiently clear. Ruskin completely disregarded the fact that Locke's discussion pertained to "nominal" reality and that he himself, in alienating "essense" to the realm of science, had therefore implied that metaphysical form and the form of art were two different things. But the magic spell of the word form has conjured a platonic idealism, almost a symbolism, into Ruskin's reasoning, the specific connotation which Locke gave form has changed, has closed the mind to observation and led to a doctrine very close to the ideal tradition of neo-classicism. Yet the meaning of truth is confounded when one arrives at the conclusion that in art which deals with appearances only, form is the true truth and color is an untrue truth. When all is merely appearance of reality, one chooses *this* as truly real and *that* as untrue real by a hocus-pocus of lan-

guage, authority and lusty rhetoric, rather than by any logical criterion. In such argument an oracular sincerity is the beguiling devil.

But Ruskin was following a very natural inclination. He had two distinct kinds of ideas to be related, first his own observations, excellent in themselves on matters of form, light, shade and color in painting, second, he had the general term form in his head, with the other traditional doctrinal signs characteristic, species, specific. In these he probably had a conventional faith, as he felt them leading to the sort of reality which would satisfy him. It is difficult to explain his reasoning in any other way. His derogation of color at this time is more easily understood. He was prejudiced against color partly because he knew least about it and partly because he had found that he had almost no talent for it.

Furthermore, at this time his taste had not yet fully matured. He was still impressed with the ostentatious chiaroscuro of Rembrandt and the magnificent distortion of Michael Angelo. Both conventional composition and what we should now call "empathic" elements in the arts affected him strongly. Added to this was his awareness of distinctions in form which his botany and geology had given him. All these contributed to his employment of the concept of form descriptively rather than metaphysically. The traditional terms were there and he used them unconscious of their traditional implications.

What could they mean, exactly, as applied to painting? What rational chain could link his own observations with universals which had Aristotle and Plato behind them, and Reynolds, and the conservative geology and biology which fascinated him? Locke's theory of primary qualities seemed to him to supply a reasonable explanation of the mystery of permanence or true identity in the shifting and accidental appearance of things. Without the

background of Locke's metaphysic and certainly with no Platonic theory of "ideas," Ruskin forced the term "form" to refer to the artistic facts which he observed empirically and to the characteristic ideality which he superimposed on appearance. Form became the rational bridge between the concrete and the abstract. A genuine failure to comprehend the direction of Locke's empirical analysis (because it was disguised by the formalism of his doctrine) and a real ignorance of Greek metaphysics made more than possible such empty rationalization.

Not only was his use of the concept "Form" theoretically confusing, but the doctrine of primary qualities had suffered severe criticism since Locke's time. It was no longer unquestioned by English or German philosophers. Moreover, English and French art was soon to upset the literal application of the doctrine to art. Turner was to achieve form through a subtle gradation of light and shade in which color held an important part and the impressionists were to forsake traditional means of chiaroscuro in achieving form through color itself. Ruskin himself was later to defend Turner for doing just these things, things that shocked the academicians and that led logically to Impressionism. It is nicely ironical therefore that the young theorist should have so easily constructed a theoretic frame which his mature criticism was to destroy. For had he carried such theories into his criticism he would never have found the primary and secondary qualities of which he had been so certain. But Ruskin seldom used theoretical terms about specific painters. He said little of ideal reality later on and he denied the intellectual reality of beauty. He let his youthful theory stand, without troubling himself to examine it again. He concerned himself with the more interesting and useful observations upon the various ways of representing natural facts in paint.

Ruskin found, however, a second explanation for artistic truth which was more successful. It probably appeared to him as coincident with the first, or grew perhaps from the fact that he found himself running too close to the neo-classical intellectualism which he had foresworn. At any rate he builds his second theory not on the acceptance of authority but in opposition to it. The point of departure is the doctrine of ideal species, the center of Reynolds' theory of representation and the traditional justification of the grand style. In the *Idler* papers Reynolds had presented a simple idealism, he observed that "every species of animal, as well of the vegetable creation may be said to have a fixed or determinate form toward which nature is continually inclining." The grand style is to be attained by recognizing and expressing this "inclination of nature" rather than by any theory of decorative formalism such as that put forward by Hogarth or of intellectual formalism such as that held by followers of Plotinus. In the *Discourses* (principally in *Discourse III*) Reynolds makes it clear that it is the central or average form in each species which represents this purpose of nature. To represent nature truly, the artist must find the general truths concerning nature, the general characters of species, in so far as his representation of the object is a representation of its general characteristics it will be true to nature in fact and spirit, it will be significant and grand.

Now Ruskin agreed with Reynolds on two fundamental assumptions, that nature was the source from which ideal truth could be derived<sup>8</sup> and that each species had a determinate form which was in general unrealized, but toward which all inclined. In other words, Ruskin firmly believed that the Creator had devised an ideal character for each species. But this was as far as Ruskin could follow tradition,<sup>9</sup> at this point he turned to attack

He would not accept Reynolds' modifications of the ideal. So-called "general" truth, he believed, did not at all represent nature's determinate form. If one is to talk about the value of general truths to art, he said, one will find them less important than particular truths. The artist must be concerned with what is. The term *species*, moreover, Ruskin interpreted in a manner opposite to Reynolds. *Species* did not seem to him an important instrument of classification because of its generality. In art, he said, the general idea is subordinated and the particularity of a *species* emphasized. The importance for art of the general classification of drapery, he argued, is not that it includes all kinds of drapery, but that it separates drapery from everything else. It seemed obvious to him that a painter had more to give than merely the generality of a subject. He observed that in each case of painting something, it is the predicate of that something that matters, not the generality of it. The painting is good in so far as it is a characteristic representation—in so far as it is particular rather than general.

So far, the trend of Ruskin's thought was out of line with idealism. He had but succeeded in making the ancient clash between abstract and concrete expressiveness the more startling. Did he realize how close he was to contradicting what he most fundamentally believed in? The particular character in the flux of appearance is scarcely to be held representative of the permanent aspect of things. If one denies the general truths in which Reynolds had found order and magnificence, where is one to find the pattern of divine glory and divine law which Ruskin was convinced art should strive to express? His criticism of Reynolds had arisen from the facts of his own observation and experience in drawing and painting. He had been tenaciously honest, but how was he to be true to his faith?

The way out for Ruskin lay in his realization that arguments from particular or general were misleading. He saw that the terms limited discussion, that an "either or" argument avoided a real explanation. He put aside these terms and began again with the larger meaning he had given the term species. The important truth for art is the distinctive or, as he prefers to call it, characteristic. This truth, he said, lies neither in the ideal alone nor in the accidental differences of species. The differences arise from imperfections, and the ideal *may* be beyond or different from the actual qualities of man, animal, vegetable, rock, raindrop, snowflake or cloud that appear in nature. Character lies in specific degrees of perfection.

At this point Ruskin had introduced a chain of possibilities which, had he known the synthetic systems of Hirt and Kant (not to speak of Schelling, who is nearest him in this matter), might have staggered him with its metaphysical bulk.<sup>10</sup> But he was ignorant of these philosophies, he argued simply. He admitted indirectly the partial relevance of accidental variation as well as of the ideal. It is the difference in the degree of perfection of actual forms, he said, which fully characterizes them, it is only the specific differences which characterize the species.

Now it seemed to him quite obvious that absolute perfection is rarely to be found in the natural or the human world, but what could be found by honest and acute observation was the exact degree to which an individual had realized the *intended* perfection of its form. To secure this exact degree, the artist had not only to observe the individual, but the whole species. When he understands what the perfect or constant form is, says Ruskin, then he can represent the characteristic truth about his given subject. Then only will the truth be at once ideal and truly particular; then only will it comprise the "histori-



cal" or "biographical" implications concerning the state of the object which are the valuable sources of interest for the human mind

Here, in the attainment of the exact or characteristic degree of perfection, is the point at which the imagination enters the artistic process of creating "Seeing true" distinguishes artistic representation from copy, the artist from the common man. The act of apprehending the characteristic form of an individual or a species is imaginative, for it implies realization of what the intended perfection is. One might, it is true, call this imaginative act a kind of inspired guessing, but Ruskin believed that the act of ascertaining this specific degree of perfection is precisely what should be demanded of perception if perception is to be considered fine or artistic. The imagination itself as it operates in the process of composition apprehends truth with intuitive faculties, not with the intellect; it relies basically upon sense perception.

This is what Ruskin meant when he said that artistic perception is inherently sensitive, and this is why he believed that the perception of great truth in experience depends upon the consistent welfare of what he calls the moral nature. Finally, this is why, when his views are seriously considered, "truths of fact" often become no more than poetic impressions of appearance. But such paradoxes must wait for elucidation.

#### REAL AND IDEAL

The most dramatic thing about the growth of Ruskin's theory is the ever recurring emphasis now on the ideal, now on the realistic aspect of artistic truth. The doctrine of characteristic truth, just reviewed, allows the development of this dual emphasis. It is essentially idealistic, but it is not traditional neo-platonism. Later in his theory

of the beautiful, because he had been reasoning from the ideal, Ruskin suddenly fell into a sentimental Platonism. Had he known at this time any *Ἀριστοτελῆαν* metaphysics, he would probably have become an intellectual Platonist, he was clearly an idealist at heart. There is, however, evidence in Ruskin's works arguing for a realistic rather than for an idealistic position.

Again and again in his criticism of paintings he seeks the concrete representation of fact.<sup>11</sup> In 1870, reacting strongly to much of his earlier religious enthusiasm for a spiritual aura in art, he declares that "Whatever is truly great in either Greek or Christian art, is also restrictedly human", he points to the fact that the "celestemente balando" of his adored Fra Angelico (the purest sort of naive idealism) was derived after all from the "Mirth of Florentine Maidens"! What exactly could he mean by such statements? How could he talk of the ideal and the real expressed in a single object of art? These are questions central to the understanding of his theory.

The doctrine of "characteristic truth" permitted Ruskin with some show of consistency to make such enigmatic statements. It was this doctrine, extended into what he called "*true* idealism" or a "*naturalist* ideal," that made possible his inordinate claims for the "service" which he believed art could render "in the actual uses of daily life." Art, he thought, had the double power of being both materially and spiritually informative. This is one of the chief tenets in the third volume of *Modern Painters* and in the lectures delivered to his Oxford audiences in 1870-72. It is typical that he should recall the sentiments of Carlyle to support him in his opinion that the real was the only adequate, stimulating source: "either retire," said Carlyle, "or understand and record what is true," and Ruskin kept saying that in art a record

of "what is true" is the record of the real appearance of things

Ruskin believed that all truly great art is to be understood not as a mere combination of real and ideal elements which are thought of separately and in contradiction, but, because of its facts of substance and its facts of form which cannot be separated in the actual piece of art, it must be seen to be at once real and ideal. He went so far as to declare that true idealism in art "concerns itself simply with things as they ARE, and accepts, in all of them, alike the evil and the good." He affected these paradoxes because he meant them, because he was certain his theory explained them.

The apparent contradiction in terms he resolved as follows. It is through the necessity of form that imagination enters into the artistic process. The artist's imaginative power of composition or, as Ruskin calls it, "arrangement," forms the content into a "noble whole" an idealized unity of dependent parts each of which in itself may be representative fact or realism. For example, in Tintoret's *Adoration of the Magi*, the unity of composition both in subject and arrangement is manifest, but, says Ruskin, "the peculiarity is, that the beauty of each figure is displayed to the utmost, while yet, taken separately, the Madonna is an unaltered portrait of a Venetian girl, the Magi are unaltered Venetian senators, and the figure with the basket, an unaltered market-woman of Mestre." The form, however, is not a superimposed ideal, it lies in the actual grasping or conceiving of truth by the artist. The inferior artists, the vulgar, the insensitive, see fact only partially. they often try to invent form. Genius, however, discovers it, genius sees the whole real thing." . . . A man," Ruskin declares, "who can see truth at all, sees it wholly, and neither desires nor dares to mutilate it." The perception of characteristic truth (the exact

degree of perfection) is just this seeing of the whole truth, for it necessitates the recognition of imperfections in the light of a generic ideal

By such argument Ruskin follows Aristotle's middle course, the representation of things as they are, and reconciles it, so far as art is concerned, with the representation of things better than they are. Thus he asserts that the finest or greatest art is "taken straight from nature" and that the whole power of a painter or poet "to describe rightly what we call an ideal thing, depends upon its being thus, to him, not an ideal, but a *real* thing" Even so, in a single paragraph does he hitch Greek idealism to *Revelation*. "Write the things *which thou hast seen*, and the things *which are*" He illustrates an important "emotionalist" principle, disguised as "realistic" by an instance from Shakespeare which expresses most perfectly his strange yet necessary doctrine.

"Finally, as far as I can observe, it is a constant law that the greatest men, whether poets or historians, live entirely in their own age Dante paints Italy in the thirteenth century, Chaucer, England in the fourteenth, Masaccio, Florence in the fifteenth; Tintoret, Venice in the sixteenth, all of them utterly regardless of anachronism and minor errors of every kind, but getting always vital truth out of the vital present

"If it be said that Shakespeare wrote perfect historical plays on subjects belonging to the preceding centuries, I answer that they *are* perfect plays just because there is no care about centuries in them, but a life which all men recognize for the human life of all time, and thus it is, not because Shakespeare sought to give universal truth, but because, painting honestly and completely from the men about him, he painted that human nature which is indeed constant enough—a rogue in the fifteenth century being, *at heart*, what a rogue is in the nineteenth and was in the twelfth, and an honest or a knightly man being, in like manner, very similar to other such at any

time And the work of these great idealists is, therefore, always universal, not because it is *not portrait*, but because it is *complete* portrait down to the heart, which is the same in all ages, and the work of the mean idealists is *not* universal, not because it is *portrait*, but because it is *half* portrait,—of the outside, the manners and the dress, not of the heart ” <sup>12</sup>

The historical importance of Ruskin's theory is considerably greater than is ordinarily believed to be the case He has broken through what Professor Bosanquet calls “the essential limitations of Hellenic theory concerning the beautiful”, <sup>13</sup> he has reconciled poetic inspiration, the imaginative apprehension of truth, with the hard accuracy of sense perceptions in representative art Truth so far as art is concerned—that is, the truth of appearance—is not simply universal Consequently, it cannot be explained by an intellectual symbolism, or an arbitrary esthetic pattern imposed upon nature by the mind, as the neo-Platonists like Mengs and Cousin or the formalists like Hogarth, Reynolds and Fuseli held Artistic truth is not, on the other hand, particular, it does not consist of mere sensations stimulated by a particular object or the associations which the object excites, as the empiricists such as Hume, Burke and Alison insisted It is specific, implying actual observation of sensuous detail on the one hand, and on the other an ultra-sensitive perception of formal order. In short, it is at once concrete and ideal.

Ruskin has thus reconciled the directly antagonistic elements in the long attempt by English writers to interpret the classical bugbear “imitation” in a manner relevant to the achievements of their own artists His theory was particularly applicable to the work of young painters, notably Turner, who were then combining in their landscapes a poetic impression with a literal record of facts

Ruskin, moreover, has anticipated in this part of his theory those modern students of esthetics who argue that art is a way of seeing things whole, as distinct from knowing them in terms of their parts or their rational implications.<sup>14</sup>

Yet in applying his principle to actual paintings and painters, Ruskin becomes involved in digressions which increase with his age, with the pleasure of lecturing and with his growing concern for the social and moral state of the nation. To slight these aberrations, especially as they lean toward a moral idealism rather than an esthetic realism and thus qualify the recurring emphasis upon the importance of facts in art, would be as perverse as to take one of them (as has often been done) for an interpretation of his whole theoretical position.

The landscape painter, Ruskin said, must do two things: he must try "To induce in the spectator's mind the faithful conception of any natural object whatsoever", and must attempt "To guide the spectator's mind to objects most worthy of contemplation, and to inform him of thoughts and feelings with which these were regarded by the artist himself."

Now the first of these principles extends the province of art to all nature, great, small, beautiful or ugly; it is certainly sweeping enough to please any realist, but in application it is soon qualified. Even in the first volume of *Modern Painters* Ruskin begins the qualification. Although the principle implies no selection of facts, Ruskin remarks that it is usually united with a selection of "such objects as are naturally and constantly pleasing to all men at all times." By introducing the idea of pleasure, Ruskin is tying this principle to his theory of beauty, for, as will be shown, objects which give pleasure are to him beautiful objects. His addition, nevertheless,

amounts practically to a contradiction of his bold phrase "any natural object whatsoever"

In the second principle Ruskin's entanglement with ideals is apparent "To guide the spectator's mind to objects most worthy of contemplation, and to inform him of thoughts and feelings" this is indeed a complicated purpose What are the objects worthy of contemplation? It would be easy to make Ruskin contradict himself by holding him to his faith in nature—by answering, "Any natural object" He had said that true representation must give the "characteristic truth", this should have been the sufficient guiding principle of landscape But Ruskin could not follow it intrepidly, he involved himself in qualifications

These objects worthy of contemplation, one discovers, must be beautiful, they must be useful in the sense that they are sources of information, they must also be noble, or if one is to be permitted to translate this into his own later usage, they must appeal to gentlemen All these are emotional restrictions Finally, Ruskin's broad concept of "worthy objects" is restricted by the fact that Ruskin believed that only rare and cultivated minds could truly perceive them, hence their perception must itself be considered rare, fine, special Special, beautiful, useful, respectable!—One sees the beginnings of the moral basis for art and the ethical limitations of that basis

Thus, Ruskin has introduced into his first functional principle of landscape painting qualifications which show a strong emotional if not idealistic tendency In the early volumes of *Modern Painters*, particularly in Volume III, he is partly saved from restricting art's province by his theory of "natural idealism" He is also aided by his declaration that all nature is beautiful, an excessively romantic and poetic illusion, so obviously untrue that it is later denied.<sup>15</sup> Yet he continued to pile emotional pref-

erences on top of his doctrine of truth. These prejudices were too subtle to be recognized as contrary to the implications of his realistic foundation. So his theory followed contrary lines and grew to the mould of his personality.

Qualifications of his first principle are to be explained by the fact that Ruskin was psychologically incapable of looking at all natural truths as they are seen today represented in literature and painting. He could not face literally the implications of unrestricted naturalism. He wanted to keep his faith in "characteristic truth" unconditional, but he is crippled not only by his temperament, but by the prevailing views of the period. In 1870, in a passage which he never changed, he declares openly that though the function of art is to give facts, it must have beautiful facts to represent and this necessitates a clean country. For a dozen years he had been adapting his theory of art to a humanitarian idealism. Though he began with the world's wide landscape, Ruskin returned with all his theoretical baggage to the highways of Victorian England.

But Ruskin had never been so foolish as to claim that truth of fact alone was a complete artistic criterion. Even in landscape, where he tried hard to make truth of fact the dominant element in his defense of modern painting, he pointed explicitly to the invariable associations of beauty, technical knowledge and poetic feeling. The generalization concerning the purpose of landscape—to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the artist—indicates that feeling is significant and inevitable even where truth is represented. Turner's work could illustrate the beauty of things felt as well as the truth of things seen.

It is true that Ruskin often uses his truth doctrine as a test question. He advises the interested observer of pictures always to ask before a painting "whether it have



any virtue or substance in this chain of truth, whether it have recorded or interpreted anything before unknown." And he adds, with the characteristic dogmatism of his later years (1870)—"unless it has clearly one of these main objects,—either *to state a true thing*, or to *adorn a serviceable one* ." "it must yet be of an inferior kind", or again, with broader bearing, "The entire vitality of art depends upon its being full of truth or full of use, " But these applications of his principle of truth do not ban the consideration of emotion His employment of the term *useful* in a high emotional sense was one of his favorite paradoxes In all his discussion of the theory of landscape he implies that the characteristic truth is felt by the individual artist When discussing questions of truth in the first volume feeling is less emphasized, but after 1846 the importance of emotion is more explicit The feelings involved in perceiving truth are called moral emotion, art is partly its expression

Ruskin's combination of moral and emotional principles with those of esthetic truth remains confusing, but his later theoretical additions do not deny the principle of truth The confusion tends to disappear as one realizes that Ruskin is trying to fit his criterion of truth to his concept of beauty, and to relate both truth and beauty to Victorian morals The modification of the truth doctrine varies in extent as Ruskin's interest at different times shifts its emphasis from the representative value of art to the emotional When, for example, he thinks of art as conveying informative facts, the doctrine of characteristic truth is held closely When, on the other hand, he thinks of art as expressing a personality—the artist's own vision—then the qualifications of "characteristic truth" are heavy and intricate.

William Hazlitt, the genius among common-sense critics, had faced the same apparent contradiction more

than twenty years before. His explanation, had Ruskin been aware of it, might have helped clarify the latter's statements. Hazlitt had considered how "a copy" could be both true (to nature) and at the same time original, the expression of a personality. The obvious comment would be, he said, that an imitation must be either "trite and commonplace" or open itself "to the charge of extravagance, distortion and singularity." Such is precisely Ruskin's dilemma. But Hazlitt's explanation is more convincing than any Ruskin offered in so many words, and it is very similar to the substance of the elaborate explanation found in Ruskin's analysis of imagination.

Hazlitt believes that the dilemma over originality arises from certain popular misconceptions of nature and of the human capacity for seeing. Because language represents an object by one word, we often imagine that the word and the object are one and the same thing, furthermore, because "we think that anyone who has eyes can see a face" we often assume that "one person sees it just like another." But the visual perceptions of objects and their verbal symbols are most often dissimilar. "Nature presents an endless variety of aspects, of which the mind seldom takes in more than a part or than one view at a time, and it is in seizing on this exposed variety, in giving some one of these new but easily recognized features in its characteristic essence, and according to the peculiar bent and force of the artist's genius, that true originality consists." <sup>16</sup>

Now it is just this combination of truth with "originality" that Ruskin is stressing when he demands of a picture that it shall record something in the chain of natural truth and at the same time "interpret" something "before unknown." His use of phrases was often unfortunate. Again and again, as in this very instance, he let himself in for more than he meant: what a number of

things could not the word interpret imply! Not only things of which Ruskin would have approved, such as a Turner interpretation of Venice, but things which would have sent him into fits of declamatory abuse. Whistler's interpretation of the Thames, for example! He had inherited a Scotch instinct for generalizing, but his English environment had tuned his ear to delight in the popular phrase; the combination was often fatal to a reader's comprehension of his true meaning. His generalizations, Biblical quotations, and paradoxes have to be read in the light of his whole engagement with theory. Isolated, they pervert his predominant attitude, their rhetorical emphasis more often than not leads to misconstruction. His principles of truth, therefore, must be seen in their relation to his principles of beauty; the moral depth of imagination must be plumbed, only then may the full extent of Ruskin's esthetic naturalism be understood. Only then can one be certain that when he quoted Carlyle's words "Romance for grown persons [is] Reality,"<sup>17</sup> he had not already, like Carlyle, turned reality into romance.

Two questions thus emerge from the discussion of Ruskin's principle of representative truth. First, what is the relation of this abstraction, truth, to the other abstraction, beauty? Second, what notions constitute his morality? When he says, for example, that verity or utility is not the highest moral element in art but the vital element, and when he adds that beauty is the highest moral element, the modern reader is utterly lost in a system of ideal nonsense.

Ruskin's theory seems to rely upon the use of a jargon that is now fantastic and meaningless particularly because the esthetic jargon of our generations has become so much less simple. It is necessary, then, that one reach back into the English traditions of beauty and morals to find the associations upon which Ruskin's meaning in-

evitably depends. For even a brief acquaintance with past theories may lift from Ruskin's the shadows cast by our own

BOSANQUET, B *A History of Aesthetic* N Y 1910

SHAWCROSS, J Edition of Coleridge's *Biographia literaria* Oxford 1907 (particularly the Introduction)

While not specifically indebted, I have used in the preceding chapter, chapter vi and in part iii the following modern works on esthetics

BARNES, *The Art in Painting*, BUCHANON, *Poetry and Mathematics*, BELL, *Art*, BUERMAYER, *The Aesthetic Experience*, CARPENTER, *The Esthetic Basis of Greek Art*, CARRIT, *The Theory of Beauty*, DEWEY, *Experience and Nature*, DUCASSE, *The Philosophy of Art*, FRY, *Vision and Design*, GILBERT, *Studies in Recent Aesthetics*, HARRISON, *Ancient Art and Ritual*, HILDEBRAND, *The Problem of Form* (Trans Meyer and Ogden 1893), LEE, *The Beautiful*, LEWIS, *Time and Western Man*, PARKHURST, *Beauty*, PARKER, *The Analysis of Art*, MCMAHON, *The Meaning of Art*, OGDEN, *The Meaning of Meaning*, OGDEN, RICHARDS and WOOD, *The Foundation of Aesthetics*, RICHARDS, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, SANAYANA, *The Sense of Beauty*, SCOTT, *The Architecture of Humanism*, STEIN, *The A-B-C of Aesthetics*

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMPLEX TRADITIONS OF BEAUTY

#### THE ADVANCE OF EMPIRICISM

RUSKIN's first principles tended to keep the focus of art realistic, but the problem of beauty, his second subject of inquiry, held undiscovered possibilities for romantic implications. Ruskin's case for artistic truth had justified landscape on the basis of representing the real appearance of nature. By distinguishing the "characteristic" reality which art could present from the superficial imitation of nature he had, nevertheless, opened a wedge for imagination. This was necessary for the success of any theory that might explain the magic of the new art, for nature in its newly extended sense had become the fountain-head of imaginative revelations.

Though true records of simple life and natural scene were popular, it was the beauty of nature and natural sentiment which the literature of the past forty years had been exploiting. The concept of nature had not merely been shifted from general outlines and mechanical laws to the intricate classifications of the botanist, the geologist and the mineralogist, it had been, since the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, pushed into the center of mysteries—the very sources of physical life, the involutions of the cosmos. A glamour had descended upon the earth: fire, air and water had again laid claim upon the awe in men's hearts. Mountains, which in the seventeenth century<sup>1</sup>

had been considered "high and hideous," were now "majestic" even in Sussex

Human nature, also, had been renovated for speculative and poetical purposes Sensibility, as Miss Austen pointed out in vain, was more apparent than sense Old passions, newly and poetically esteemed, were increasingly difficult for "the virtuous, rational men of nature" to crowd into a "moral faculty"—the only cubbyhole that eighteenth century psychology had provided In certain evangelical quarters these embarrassing instinctive impulses were rapidly being accepted as the natural indications of a divinely quickened soul In esthetics they were being found to have a various but undeniable connection with "beauty "

While the eighteenth century Academicians were still in their chairs at the Royal Academy and the echoes of Reynolds' closing tribute to Michael Angelo had scarcely passed away, a number of new theories were making their appearance One of the least philosophical of these, one which took educated society by storm, appeared in 1794, *An Essay on The Picturesque as compared with The Sublime and the Beautiful, and on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, by Uvedale Price, Esq Sir Walter Scott, who studied the book and himself wrote an essay on landscape gardening, claimed that Price "converted the age to his views " <sup>2</sup> But it might be just as fairly said that the age was ripe for conversion.

The term *picturesque* had been used in a variety of ways for many years. The Abbé Du Bos, whose *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music* was translated in 1748 by Thomas Nugent, Gent, uses the term in reference to composition in painting He means by it specifically "the arrangement of such objects as are to have place in a picture with regard to the general effect

of the piece.”<sup>3</sup> But as Miss Manwaring observes, the term had a great range of meaning: it varied from the Italian “*pittresco*” (meaning painter-like, *not* picture-like) to the loose romantic signification in the literary works of Steele, Pope and others. The travel literature of Gray, Young and certain ladies of literary fame combined with the popularity of the landscapes of Salvator Rosa to identify the term with wild, rugged and romantic scenery; but William Guilpin in his *Essay On Prints* (1768) means by it precisely “That kind of beauty which would look well in a picture.” The formalistic principles of seventeenth century Roman landscape, furthermore, determined for Guilpin what *would* “look well.” But by 1790, when Price’s famous essay was published, it is clear that he was eager to give a more free and less formal connotation to the term. He and his friend Payne Knight attacked the rigidly conventional principles of design which the landscape gardeners Brown and Repton had established. The vogue, however, was short lived. It reached its height in the nineties and was over by 1800. It is the practice of these enthusiasts and the doctrines of Price, Payne Knight and others that are satirized so gently by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* and so robustly by Peacock in *Headlong Hall*.

A convention, however, may die in one rank of society only to pass into the ideals of another class. Though the “romantic” essays of Payne Knight<sup>4</sup> and others were highly ridiculed, though the term picturesque fell distinctly out of grace, wild and exotic scenes continued to fascinate the readers of the Waverley Novels and the purchasers of landscapes. Natural beauty was increasingly esteemed for its infinite variety, its evanescence, even its disorder and its decay. Taste had been profoundly affected by the momentary enthusiasm for the picturesque and the sublime; though terms themselves

were changed the concepts and principles of Price's theory influenced nineteenth century esthetics till 1850

The structure of this theory is very simple Price accepts the definitions of the sublime and the beautiful as given by Burke and marks out another type of esthetic experience which does not quite fit these categories This is the picturesque. It is nearer the sublime than the beautiful, but it does not rely entirely upon the instinct of fear for its effects—rather upon fear and awe softened into pity and sentimental regard The picturesque depends upon intricacy in landscape which is defined as "that disposition of objects, which, by a partial and uncertain concealment, excites and nourishes curiosity" <sup>5</sup>

This is very near one of the qualities which Hogarth had ascribed to beauty, but Burke had observed that beauty was characterized by smoothness and gradual variation, whereas the picturesque has, as its essential qualities, "roughness" and "sudden variation" The "sudden protuberances" of Gothic architecture are thus much more picturesque than the regularities of the Grecian, though the discerning eye perceives them less beautiful Size in the picturesque is not so great as to become monstrous or gigantic, but it is always greater than in merely beautiful objects So, too, as youth and freshness are associated with beauty, age and decay are characteristic of the picturesque. The category enfolds many characteristics common to the poems of Crabbe, Cowper and the early Wordsworth Thus Price "fills a vacancy between the sublime and the beautiful, and accounts for the pleasure we receive from many objects, on principles distinct from them both"

This is the full theoretical substance of what Price has to say. His book amounts merely to the application of a very proper tag to a vast store of objects then generally admired but as yet not exactly classified under



popular epithets. He carries his discourse, however, into the field of landscape gardening with great success, turning to the paintings of Salvator, Claude and Gasper Poussin for the authority of his effects. He believes thoroughly in the influence of painting on the eye, in making it aware of beautiful objects and teaching it "how to separate, to select and combine." Like William Gulpin,<sup>6</sup> though with less artificiality, he carries on the academic eighteenth century doctrine that "the general form" of nature is the significant source of all artistic pleasure. But the artistic principles of his gardening are directly subversive to the traditional eighteenth century school of formal pattern, he rises to scorn the acreages which "have been ruined" by the introduction of "artificial water," of designs that have nothing to do with "nature and her processes." It is an amusing book—at once a source and an authority for the conventional descriptions of "wild nature" in novels of the period.

Price's contention for the picturesque was indirectly supported in theory by the important psychological esthetics of Archibald Alison, and Payne Knight, even more than Price, relied upon this theorist. Alison, as I shall explain below, carried on Burke's distinction between the sublime and the beautiful but gave a radical explanation for these experiences which he derived from a theory of the association of ideas. In 1810, however, Dugald Stewart published his "Essay on The Beautiful" among other *Philosophical Essays*, and attempted therein to refute Burke's division of esthetic experience by following out a qualified theory of association exploited by Alison in 1790. He argued that "the sublime" and "the picturesque" are merely "epithets to limit the meaning of the generic name 'Beauty' in particular instances." He believed that the sublime and the picturesque united in

landscape "of highest effect" <sup>7</sup> Stewart failed, however, to stem the theoretical progress of these notions, but his essay was important in refining the doctrines of Alison, in making more sharp the psychological distinctions in esthetic experience and in defining the metaphysical implications upon which Alison's conclusions rested.

Alison's theory deserves more than casual attention because of its influence. It is a sterling example of the combination of the empirical tradition from Hume and Burke and the moral bias of the Edinburgh school. It perfectly illustrates the new enthusiasm for nature and the new adaptation of old theology to conservative conclusions. Six years out of Balliol College and destined for an Anglican parish in Edinburgh, Archibald Alison published his *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* in London. In spite of its originality, his work seems to have had little influence upon the theoretical notions of Royal Academy professors of art; yet its effect upon theorists later than those already mentioned is discernable. Coleridge and Wordsworth seem to have been aware of it and, almost fifty years later, John Ruskin read and absorbed much more of it than he realized.

While Alison's philosophical position is akin to that of the common-sense school, and while he is influenced in his final conclusions by an indirect and qualified neo-Platonism, his treatise on taste is deliberately empirical in method of argument. He is not, however, the first promulgator of the doctrine of association of ideas as applied to taste, his combination of empiricism with an idealistic purpose precisely suggests Alexander Gerard as a source. Yet Alison carries his psychology much further, had he lived sixty years later, he might easily have become an experimental psychologist in esthetics.

"Objects which can be called beautiful," he observes, "are those which produce emotions of beauty and sub-

limity" These emotions are specifically different from simple emotions of pleasure produced by ordinary objects, they are different in that they contain what appear to be "interesting or affecting qualities" which stimulate the imagination to "the prosecution of a train of thought" <sup>8</sup> These trains of thought are made up in all cases of associations of an emotional sort, they are different from ordinary trains of thought or common associations, in that they possess "a uniform principle of connection through the whole of the train" An impression of an object, to put it briefly, contains associations stimulated by the object, which are unified in both their objective and sentimental qualities Any object which stimulates an impression in which the emotional associations are discordant could not be considered beautiful Objects of art present a perfect illustration of this capacity to stimulate unified emotional trains Alison believes they may be judged by their apparent unity "That composition is most excellent in which the different parts most fully unite in the production of *one* unmingled emotion, and that taste is most perfect where the perception of this relation of objects, in point of expression, is most delicate and precise"

Beauty, in other words, consists in this thought process itself Alison explains further "Whenever this train of thought, or this exercise of the imagination is produced, we are conscious of an emotion of a higher and more pleasing kind" This emotion, though it is properly called an emotion of taste, seems impossible to describe in language This is probably due to its complexity, as it is distinct from the ordinary emotions of pleasure In the latter, "feeling follows immediately the presence of the object or quality, and has no dependence upon anything for its perfection but the sound state of the sense by which it is received", but the esthetic emotion (or as he

calls it, the emotion of taste) is dependent upon the exercise of our imagination and the actual existence of a unified train of associated feelings. Thus, esthetic experience contains simple pleasure but, because of the peculiar constitution of our nature, this experience is complicated by an associative process of mind in which the range seems unlimited but the form conditioned by a principle of unity.

Alison proceeds to consider in great detail and at great length the nature of these associations. There are two classes. first, those which appear to be directly instinctive, such as all personifications of objects, or attempts to bestow upon an object attributes of benevolence or sentiment, second, those which appear to him to be indirect, or the result of environment. This second group is very large, Alison's classification covers many pages and includes (though his differentia are elementary) practically all types of associations of which we are conscious together with those which remain unconscious.<sup>9</sup>

Alison's conclusion is of greater historical significance than even such an historian as Bosanquet has noted, for his summary combines with the doctrine of association certain half-mystical tenets of naturalistic doctrine, which give his theory a moral and a religious sanction. His whole endeavor may be summed up as an attempt to prove that each of the qualities we attribute to matter "is either from nature, from experience, or from accident, the sign of some quality capable of producing Emotion, or the exercise of some moral affection. And, that when these associations are dissolved, or in other words, when the material qualities cease to be significant of the associated qualities, they cease also to produce the emotions, either of sublimity or beauty." Thus, he continues, "if these conclusions are admitted, it appears necessarily to follow, that the beauty and sublimity of such objects is

to be ascribed, not to the material qualities themselves, but to the qualities they signify. And, of consequence, that the qualities of matter are not to be considered as sublime or beautiful in themselves, but as being the signs or expressions of such qualities as, by the constitution of our nature, are fitted to produce pleasing or interesting Emotion ”

The final four pages of his essay are a vigorous and thoroughly charming explanation of how, after this theory of the beautiful is understood, it becomes plain that the experience of beauty leads not only to moral sentiments but directly to religious emotion above all other; how important it is, therefore, that children be trained in esthetic experience of nature and of art, and how ultimately such experience may confirm faith and bring peace to the mind. He is convinced, he says upon this last point, “that the principle of curiosity which is the instinctive spring of all scientific inquiry into the phenomena either of matter or of mind, is never satisfied until it terminates in the discovery, not only of design, but of benevolent design.” It is upon this conviction, finally, that he rests his case

Historically, therefore, Alison anticipates the approach and the schematic classification of modern psychological esthetics in his examination of the psychological phenomena in the experience of beauty. He is trying to demonstrate by shrewd though undisciplined observation what the modern psychologist develops a whole experimental laboratory to prove that taste is relative and a matter of environmental training; and that there is no “fixed objective” beauty in matter. Yet he is most interesting for the fact that he closes his empirical investigation with moral and idealistic conclusions

Though no absolute beauty exists in matter, and though esthetic taste itself depends upon training and is in any

immediate sense relative, there seem to be, in the constitution of our "moral nature," fundamentally absolute faiths upon which all our emotional and hence our esthetic discriminations are based. These conclusions he inherits from early eighteenth century moral philosophy. In fact, Alison explicitly compares his fundamental position to that of the traditional neo-Platonist in regard to this insistence upon the influence of mind over matter. His is a rather heroic attempt to present a scientific explanation of the transcendental emotion produced by natural beauty and by landscape art. He was well aware that scientists as well as poets were indulging in such emotions. The new naturalism itself was poetic and religious at its roots. Alison's essay may thus be understood as an illuminating explanation in very rational terms of the transcendental and moral aspects of this naturalism in all its devious poetical forms—forms, indeed, which one discovers in the writings of Gilbert White and Dr. Twining, in the poems of Cowper, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, in the idealistic pages of Ruskin and Emerson and in the sermons of Oxford and Cambridge scientists, discussed below in Chapter I, Part II.

The historical importance of Alison's doctrines is further illustrated by the fact that Stewart continues his theories and that Payne Knight and other critics and "landscapists" compare his views with those of Price. His book seems to be a center of controversy. Lord Jeffrey, for example, in an article on *Beauty* in the sixth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* shortly before 1840, attempts a keen criticism of the "train of thought" doctrine. He argues that it is sometimes subversive to the actual experience of beauty in that "we must soon lose sight of the external object which gave the first impulse to our thoughts." Jeffrey is quoted at length by Sir T. Dick Lauder in his *Essay on The Origin of Taste*,

another work of some importance, incorporated in Lauder's reprint of *Price on The Picturesque* Jeffrey seems to have convinced Lauder that emotions are "immediately" or "instantaneously" suggested by objects. But Lauder goes on to supply a theoretical basis for the terms used by Price, disregards Stewart and follows Alison. He therefore revives again the old distinction between the beautiful, the sublime and the picturesque, which had been introduced into England by the French, which John Bailhe had begun and Price made famous.

Lauder's theory (published in 1842) is the last expression of the picturesque tradition before Ruskin. The author is not a skilled casuist and his book evidently did not have a great circulation. But his theory represents the fullest development of psychological esthetics in England at the beginning of the Victorian era. Price's doctrines of the picturesque, he says, have as a theoretical basis no other than Alison's system, a remark truer perhaps of Payne Knight's essays than of Price's theory. But Lauder is accurate when he summarizes "the beauty which we impute to objects is nothing more than the reflection of our own inward emotions, and it is made up entirely of certain little portions of love, pity, and affection, which have been connected with these objects, and still adhere, as it were, to them, and move us anew whenever they are presented to our observation."

Lauder also forecasts twentieth century notions of association. If he or someone else had taken seriously the questions he composes, there might have developed a school of esthetics very similar to that lately founded by Ogden and Richards in Cambridge. The questions, however, remain provocative beyond Lauder's vision. "What," he asks, "are the primary affections, by the suggestion of which we think the sense of beauty is produced?" and

"What is the nature of the connexion by which we suppose that the objects we call beautiful are enabled to suggest these affections?" The modern theory of "synaesthesia" attempts to answer both these queries. But Lauder does not find it necessary "to enter into tedious details"; and psychology had at that time few such details to furnish him.<sup>10</sup>

Lauder's theory relies much more than Alison's upon social and educational factors in explaining the cultivation of taste.<sup>11</sup> It would lend itself readily to the support of the taste of any caste in control of educational centers. Far from eliminating moral associations among those connected with beauty, Lauder, like Alison, concludes that picturesque objects, as well as beautiful and sublime, stimulate moral sentiment and lead to religious emotion. He is very anxious to obtain all possible moral and religious sanction. It is his anxiety to avoid hedonistic implications that denies any connection with the utilitarian school and suggests a slight similarity to the idealized naturalism of John Ruskin. In their fundamental concepts, however, the theories are strikingly different.

#### NEW ROADS TO IDEAL BEAUTY

Ruskin published the second volume of *Modern Painters* in 1846. By this time the terms which Burke, Alison, Price, Stewart, Jeffrey, Hamilton and others had used to explain beauty, the sublime and the picturesque were well established. The principle of "association of ideas" had become traditional in the esthetics which emphasized sensation. But the results of enlivened perception, introspection and "extended vision of humanity" had proved little more than that sentiment, emotion, feeling were the important substance of new poetry, art and natural morality. The obvious problem of the rela-



tion of this emotional matter to reason and its place in any scheme of social values had directed new speculation of all sorts. The many attempts to explain conduct empirically stimulated, by 1830, a strong religious and idealistic reaction to materialistic tendencies in social philosophy. As Fairchild says, "even terms like Reason and Common Sense" had begun "to acquire transcendental connotations."<sup>12</sup> In the esthetic theories, especially concerning the problem of beauty, there were similar contrary movements.

Although Ruskin was not acquainted with many particular theories, he was aware of the general approach to the problem of beauty which the empiricist took, he had read enough of Burke, Alison and Stewart to know he could not follow their lead. On the other hand, the ideal or neo-Platonic tradition in esthetics had been equally responsive to new concepts of external and human nature, and though Ruskin temperamentally was more in sympathy with ideal than with materialistic theories, his scientific studies in Oxford had warned him against intellectualism. His own theory of beauty did not rise from assumptions of different or untraditional character, so he met one after another the difficulties which a complex tradition forced upon him. He accepted certain assumptions from both schools and progressed by bridging in one way or another the gulf which separated them. The historical significance of his speculations is heightened by the fact that two very opposite arguments meet in his explanation of beauty.

Romantic idealism, as I have said, was by no means inactive in eighteenth century England. The treatises of Du Fresnoy and Du Piles had stimulated English formalism. Du Bos and Crousaz, Batteaux and Boileau had encouraged contrary arguments among the English. Men were considering not only the importance of sensation and

feeling in art but the ideal form of nature, the romantic similarity of poetry and painting and the inspirational character of genius. From Shaftesbury to Gerard and Burke the formalistic and the empirical approaches to esthetics are ascendant. But shortly after the middle of the century Edward Young, poet and member of Addison's literary circle, published in the form of two letters to the author of *Sir Charles Grandison* a critical work entitled *Conjectures on Original Composition*<sup>13</sup>. These are representative of minor but important tendencies in poetic criticism. In spite of the conscious rationalism of poetic theory in the first half of the century a number of important writers, Blair, Addison, Bishop Hurd, John Dennis and finally Joseph Warton had candidly recognized the importance of inspiration, imagination and "the passions" in discussing poetic genius and taste. Young's speculations are characteristic of that temper of mind which reacted to the increasing sterility of academic standards in poetry and the arts and heralded a romantic revolution in literary taste.

"Wit," said Young as he argued against the Augustan doctrines of imitation from the ancients, "however brilliant, should not be permitted to gaze self-enamoured at its useless charms. . . it should sacrifice its most darling offspring to the sacred interests of virtue, and real service of mankind." Poetry should possess a social value, but this is to be achieved only by following the dictates of an inspirational muse, not the dead letters of classic perfection. "Genius is a master workman, . . . learning is but an instrument." In short, Young's theory of genius is inspirational and quite definitely in opposition to the views of Dr. Johnson and his circle, it suggests neo-Platonic idealism but implies no formal doctrine of ideas.

Young's is a good example of an idealist's view held by a classicist already half converted to romanticism.

"Genius" differs radically from "Understanding," it is compared to virtue itself, whereas understanding may be compared merely to the knowledge of the rules of virtue. "Genius is knowledge innate, and quite our own" In spite of his early Epistles which admired Pope and accepted the conventional taste of the period, the *Conjectures* are far nearer the idealism of Coleridge—even Carlyle—than the rationalism of Pope or Dr Johnson It is true that Young demarks two kinds of genius—one, "infantine" which needs learning, the other, "adult" which comes mature "from nature's hand"—but his enthusiasm for the latter, the real source of original work, indicates his bias His exordium to authors is illustrative

"Therefore dive deep into thy bosom, learn the depth, extent, bias and full sort of thy mind, contract full intimacy with the stranger within thee, know thyself excite and cherish every spark of intellectual light and heat, however smothered under former negligence, or scattered through the dull darkness of common thoughts, and collecting them into a body, let thy genius rise (if genius thou hast) as the sun from chaos, and if I should then say, like an Indian, 'Worship it'—though too bold yet should I say little more than my second rule enjoins, namely, 'reverence thyself' "

This certainly is declaration of faith in the inner depths of imagination equal to anything that occurs during the later romantic decades It is definitely prophetic of Blake himself But the neo-Platonic color is manifest in Young's picture of the spiritual order of the universe: "The great Father kindled at one flame the world of rationals, one spirit poured from spirit's awful fountain, poured Himself through all their souls, and if they continue rational, as made, resorbs them all into Himself again The Deity is all reason in his nature "

These phrases are Plotinian; they suggest neither the typical eighteenth century concept of "rational order" nor the formal, mechanical connotations given to the term understanding. The figures fall into line with the inspirational and revolutionary idealism to follow at the end of the century. Young's attacks upon the canons of "Imitation," moreover, suggest the tirades of Blake against the classicism of Sir Joshua Reynolds. By an imitative art, he believes, we counteract nature and thwart her design. "She brings us into the world all originals . . . how comes it to pass that we die copies?" So Blake and Coleridge after him declared that the artist should follow his own "natural" imagination which would interpret for him the symbolic significance of images from the universe.

But Blake made his anticlassicism ostentatious. He became vituperative upon the principles and performance of the masters of the grand style; his notes on painting, particularly his comments upon the discourses of Sir Joshua, upon Rubens and Rembrandt, are fanatical. His poems throb with a romantic paganism that became his particular contribution to the new worship of nature. But his iconoclasm and his positive natural morality rely upon a symbolism as intricate as any ever devised. Blake is thus concerned with a transcendental beauty quite as intellectual as the idealistic fabrications of the Germans who influenced Coleridge.

Coleridge also condemned the Augustan esthetic of "Imitation." Though gentle and without specific reference to paintings, his essays indicate a firm refusal to accept "the imitation of the antique." Such a doctrine, he says, tends to fix the attention "on externals rather than on the thought within"; it makes the artist satisfied with mere bodily form; it combines incongruous things, "modern feelings in antique forms." He believed that imitation "speaks in a language, . . . learned, and dead

. . . which causes a neglect of thoughts, emotions and images of profounder interest and more exalted dignity. " 14

Blake and Coleridge, moreover, stand quite aloof from the didactic idealism of the Academicians, Barry and Opie, who are still held by Reynold's doctrines of "the general form of things" and the mechanical restrictions of the grand style "Ideas of power and grandeur," which Coleridge considered superficial and Blake impious, embellished their faith in the didactic value of historical scenes. It is the formalistic ideals of the eighteenth century which animate their intentions and the efforts of Fuseli and Haydon after them.

It is in Coleridge, therefore, though the theories of Mengs and Cousin indubitably influenced English Academism, that one finds the fullest realization of an intellectualist esthetics. Coleridge shares also the revived worship of nature. Art he considered to be "the mediatrix between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is therefore the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation: colour, form, motion and sound are the elements which it combines, and it stamps them into unity in the mould of *moral* idea." 15 Thus "art itself may be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing . . . it is distinguished from nature by the unity of all the parts in one thought or idea." 16

At this point Coleridge's theory of imagination supplies an explanation for this mediation or humanizing function. Through a metaphysical reasoning extended beyond that of Schelling, from whom he borrowed, Coleridge proves that the imagination unifies the self with nature. It is the imagination or the "esemplastic" power—the universal spiritual faculty—which achieves "the identity of subject and object in the Sum, or I Am." Imagination is thus a

"reconciling or mediatory power which incorporates the reason in images of the sense, and organizes, as it were, the fluxes of the sense by the permanent self circling energies of the reason" It gives the poet or the artist the opportunity to penetrate "the underlying harmony" of human and external nature He "sees in the silent and unconscious processes of nature the same power as that of reason—the same power in a lower dignity, and therefore a symbol of the established truth of things" <sup>17</sup> Therefore, Coleridge declares in his exordium to the artist or the poet, "Believe me, you must master the essence, the *natura naturans*, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man." <sup>18</sup>

This intricate theory of the imagination makes it possible for Coleridge to unify the devious aspects of the new nature worship It allows him to blend the exact perception of detailed form in the external world with the introspection of the inspirational artist who exploits his instinctive, or what then were called moral emotions Ruskin some twenty-five years later tries to do much the same thing, but in a very different way He would have no dealings with intellectual symbolism which he seemed to fear would involve him in an intellectual rather than an emotional or a moral analysis of beauty This it certainly did for Coleridge, and his reflection that true natural philosophy "is comprised in the study of the science of symbols," <sup>19</sup> is very nearly the key to his difficult esthetics

Form is paramount to Coleridge in his analysis of beauty The beautiful "is, in the abstract, the unity of the manifold, the coalescence of the diverse; in the concrete, it is the union of the shapely with the vital" <sup>20</sup> Beauty, however, may be present in disagreeable objects whose proportion of parts constitute a whole. It is thus quite distinct from the agreeable which is the object of

mere taste, it "does not arise from association, but sometimes in the rupture of association "

Coleridge would not in the least agree, therefore, with Alison's or Lauder's theories of beauty, though he would grant them their analysis of relative and personal taste. Beauty is not different to different individuals or nations, Coleridge believes, it is "*not* connected with ideas of the good, the fit, or the useful." It is contrary to interest. He is extremely antagonistic to any mechanical theory of utility on the one hand or to any theory of mere moral value on the other. Yet Coleridge does not go back to Hogarth or Gerard or even Reynolds with their doctrines of line and general form. To be sure, he makes the statement that the beautiful in objects refers to two elements—"the shapely" or "the law and the reason" in the lines of things, and "the lively, the free, the spontaneous, and the self-justifying," in the color of objects. He even goes so far as to say that "a sensual perfection with intellect is occasionally possible without moral feeling,"<sup>21</sup> thus isolating a purely plastic, esthetic element. But this is no elementary eclecticism such as Gerard achieved by his combination of principles from Shaftesbury, Hogarth, Du Bos and Crousaz. For Coleridge, the perceptions and ideas are merely the sources of beauty as it appears in concrete objects. Beauty itself is really far more subjective and at the same time transcendental than its experience from objects would easily suggest. Beauty lies in "the idea" and "The idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form. It is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual, or the individuality itself."<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in regard to the subject matter of art Coleridge is more tolerant than the academicians, the formalists or even the moral naturalist Ruskin. Subjects, he says, "ought to be such as will affect the spectator by their

truth, their beauty, or their sublimity, and therefore they may be addressed to the judgment, the senses, or the reason. The peculiarity of the impression which they make, may be derived either from color and form, or from proportion and fitness, or from the excitement of the moral feelings, or all these may be combined. Such works as do combine these sources of effect must have their preference of dignity."

For his period this is a proposition of astonishing breadth, singularly unlimited by custom, creed or tradition. It is, in sum, a denial that art is merely concerned with beauty in the sense of the pleasant or agreeable, the smooth, the curved, the picturesque, the moral or the sublime. Had Ruskin read Coleridge's prose before composing *Modern Painters* one would be inclined to infer that he had drawn from these opinions his theory that the greatest art consists in conveying "the greatest number of greatest ideas." But he had not read Coleridge's criticism at this time, and his sweeping principle is unconsciously qualified by restrictions of moral and social creed.

In Coleridge, therefore, one finds a unique fulfillment of the esthetic demands which a new age imposed upon an idealistic tradition. But his theory had a limited influence, its complexity inhibited popular comprehension. The interesting tendencies in the thought of the period are clearly reflected, but they are based upon the most intricate metaphysic that an English critic of letters ever attempted. Through the philosophical idealism which he got from his study of Kant, Fichte and especially Schelling, Coleridge reconciled the formalism of earlier neo-Platonic theory to the new naturalist's enthusiasm for the detailed imagery of the external world. A formal concept of beauty is related to a sensual concept of the beauty of natural objects through an involved theory of



the imagination This, while it exploits the importance of subjective introspection, of emotion and impulse, at the same time transcends the sense-world to a noumenal ideal, the underlying will or "I am-ness"

Such an ideal incorporates both the self and the external universe as necessary to one another and to the revelation of "divine" truth. For underlying all Coleridge's metaphysic is the fundamental consciousness of a divine will But the concept of this will is neither an elementary pantheism nor a common-sense moral order Coleridge's is unlike any theory in England that comes before or after him and it must be said that his system (if one could call it that) remained to influence twentieth century rather than contemporary theorists For his period it was too fragmentary, elusive and complex It is more individual, more penetrating than Ruskin's but it is less interesting in its historical associations, for it contributes little to the Victorian understanding of art

#### DIFFICULTIES

Of all the specialized problems in esthetics, that concerning the nature of beauty, with the consequent and necessary examination of sensual experience, imagination, and the elements commonly called spiritual, had produced more intangible theories than any other Ruskin, handicapped as he was by puritanical associations in childhood, torn all his life by the conflict of the desire to look at facts as they were and the desire to believe that they must be otherwise, could scarcely achieve less than the normal confusion in his attempt to analyze beauty. But his difficulties were augmented by the contradictory influence of his time The melodramatic social contrasts of the first forty years of the century, the "irrational mixture of convention and revolt, of adherence to

traditional propriety, and faith in natural goodness and the inner voice,"<sup>23</sup> were all, as I have shown, reflected in the theories of art and esthetics. Neo-Platonism had actually been confused by the academician Opie with empiricism. The translation of Mengs' *Reflections upon Beauty and Taste* occurred in 1796, and that of Victor Cousin's *Lectures on Taste*, delivered in 1818, was published in England shortly afterward. The influence of German idealism was beginning to penetrate the literary criticism of Taylor, Crabb Robinson, Coleridge and others, and the romantically idealistic theories of Edward Young, Blake and Wordsworth had become deeply felt in literary taste.

But materialistic speculation kept abreast of the idealistic. Within a few years of Coleridge's theories came the Victorian reprints of earlier theorists: the Scotch philosopher Dugald Stewart's *Elements of The Philosophy of The Human Mind* (1792) was re-issued in 1814 and again in 1827, Alison's *Essays on Taste* in 1830 and Sir T. Dick Lauder's edition of *Price on the Picturesque* in 1840. These adapted the empirical type of speculation begun in the eighteenth century to the new faith in natural impulses. One must not, moreover, forget that Aristotle's *Ethics*<sup>24</sup> were regularly pounded into the heads of the young at Oxford while Plato was thrust under their arms by less orthodox but no less enthusiastic tutors.

Ruskin had as little conscious realization of the complexity of the intellectual forces about him as he had of the nature of the problem which he set out to explain in the second volume of *Modern Painters*. Influenced but unaware, he seems to have kept, at least until 1856, a faith in the simplicity of the task he had begun. "Happily for mankind," he says, "beauty and ugliness are as positive in their nature as physical pain and pleasure,

as light and darkness, or as life and death, .”<sup>25</sup> This simple assurance he had inherited from his father whose passion for landscape painting had encouraged, at an early age, the young Ruskin’s habit of sketching natural scenery. Carrying the practice into maturity had tended to keep his impressions of the beautiful concrete and sensible, for he had thought of beauty first in stones and trees and continued to associate it with feelings excited by landscape. It was only after his interest in nature yielded to an interest in character that beauty seemed to him more complex than he had once believed.

But Ruskin had picked up a great many traditional terms in his conversations with men who followed academic taste. His sincere curiosity led him at first to attempt to see in the fine arts what he thought others saw. He therefore learned the conventional jargon more thoroughly than many of his elders. The catch words—“finish,” “toning,” “chiaroscuro,” “symmetry,” “expression” and many others—were all in his vocabulary before he was twenty, and it was inevitable that his reading, when he turned to theoretical interests, should emphasize many of the principles which lay behind these critical conventions. Without historical perspective or very thorough learning Ruskin thus accumulated by 1843 a considerable store of traditional phraseology. He was acquainted in a general way with the distinctions between the sublime, the beautiful, the picturesque, he had heard of the association of ideas, of the theory of utility, of pleasure and fear as conditioning “aesthetics.” He was also particularly familiar with the formalistic phrases of eighteenth century criticism which he had found in Hogarth, Reynolds, Barry and Fuseli. He knew, for example, what importance had been placed upon various principles of proportion, how variety and unity were operative in all great objects of art, how color, line and

arrangement were supposed to manifest the fancy, the restraint, the moral imagination of the artist "Harmony," "moderation," "infinity," "vitality," "purity," "repose," were notions already rich in conventional connotations, recognized terms that argued for objective, formal concepts, terms which he had to explain and to which he had to give meaning relative to his fullest analysis of beautiful objects

It is surprising in view of his formalistic training in the appreciation of art that Ruskin so consciously avoided these objective roots of beauty. But even before he began his second volume he realized that ideas of beauty were impressions carried in the mind. At the very beginning of his discussion he took pains to point out the difference between the study of "visible facts" which he essayed in the first volume, and the investigation now before him in the second. This study, he says, "being not of things outward, and sensibly demonstrable, but of the value and meaning of mental impressions" must necessarily, therefore, "be entered upon with a modesty and cautiousness proportioned to the difficulty of determining the likeness, or community of such impressions, as they are received by different men."

But caution was scarcely one of Ruskin's virtues and the intellectual modesty vanishes in the course of twenty or thirty pages, he had already preconceived ideas as to the idealistic superstructure of his theory.<sup>26</sup> Dogmatically certain of his ideals, he is soon lost in a maze of rhetorical abstraction which he himself regards as sound theory. It is the combination of good sense, nevertheless, with his rampant idealism which gives his analysis of beauty a dramatic character, and it is the sharp, contrary implications that make it historically interesting. In order to demonstrate these features it is necessary to pursue Ruskin's arguments in some detail.

One will recall the sweeping denial of intellectual elements in his summary of the "Ideas" which art conveys. One may also recall the correlative declarations upon the instinctive nature of beauty which gave rise to the bold definition "Any material object which can give pleasure in the contemplation of its outward qualities without any direct and definite exertion of the intellect, I call in some way, or in some degree, beautiful." These and many more allusions to the radical sensuality<sup>27</sup> of beauty point to the fact that Ruskin considered beautiful objects to be the symbols of intellectual forms. I believe that Ruskin consciously avoided a neo-Platonic theory which might have led to an intellectual formalism just as he avoided a psychological theory of beauty based on the principle of association of ideas. He realized clearly that the source of the experience of beauty lay in sensation.

But it is important to comprehend clearly what he means by "sensual beauty." This phrase, used constantly through his earlier works, refers to those qualities of things which delight the senses. colors and their harmonies, light and textural appearances, forms of objects which please the eye and in no way address themselves to the mind. Never, at any time, does sensual beauty refer to sexual qualities. These he makes every attempt to deny to art,<sup>28</sup> condemning those pictures or sculptures which even modestly accentuate a sexual appeal. One of his greatest theoretical needs, therefore, was a principle by which he could discriminate instincts which were regarded as proper from those which were, in his period, held to be necessary or bestial. He tried to find this principle in a confusion of sentiment and feeling, or what he called "moral emotion." He relied upon a moral sense and upon an idealized gentility. Unlike Coleridge before

him, his "Ideas of Beauty" and his taste reveal an emotionalistic not an intellectualistic esthetic

The sensual basis, then, and the instinctive character of esthetic experience, are at once the sources of Ruskin's success and of his failure. They are consistent with his observations upon variability in the predisposition of taste,<sup>29</sup> they are the reasons for his belief in the possible inheritance of taste,<sup>30</sup> they are the result of his experiments in taste which led him to recognize the fact that degrees of enjoyment could not be indicated or choices fully explained by reason.<sup>31</sup> Although Ruskin seems to imply that a kind of universal sensitiveness to beauty exists, and suggests for the very simple experiences of beauty an intuitionist theory, he does not develop this intuition into a theory similar to the modern Crocean, rather, he stresses the fact that only specialized minds are capable of fine, true and full experience of beauty. This recognition of the necessity for specialization, cultivation and, most of all, for native capacity in the esthetic field leads later to his strong anti-democratic theories and his sympathy for Carlyle's notion of an "Intellectual Aristocracy."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, and in spite of his emphasis upon the special endowments necessary for the artist, his belief in the instinctive character of "Ideas of Beauty" kept him from isolating the esthetic experience, from making it esoteric and from separating art from the daily, social experience of life. He did not fall into the common theoretical practice of the modern half-mystical connoisseur.

Yet the predominance of instinct, sense and pleasure in the experience of the beautiful forces Ruskin to do two things which lead to inevitable conflict: first, to begin his investigation with an examination of the senses, following, as will be shown, an empirical way of reasoning, second, to thrust the entire experience of the beauti-

ful under what in his day was psychologically described as the "Moral Faculty." For instinct, Ruskin believed, is bestowed by the Creator, whose laws are the fabric of our moral life. Desires, impulses, sentiments and passions—in short all pleasure-pain values—fell under this faculty and the possibility of discovering the outlines of natural morality depended also upon "the condition" of this indescribable psychological abstraction.

Such views were not, however, the invention of Ruskin's theoretical fancy, they were, as will be shown below, common "naturalistic" doctrine. It is for this very reason that Ruskin's theory of beauty carried such popular appeal. The elasticity of what he called moral emotion, the comprehensive scope he found for beauty brought a safe and dignified justification to a public that was eager for its scenes of sentiment, its biblical or medieval fancies, its true and beautiful and "noble" landscapes.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE PROBLEM OF BEAUTY

#### EXAMINATION OF LOWER AND HIGHER SENSES

IN his first consideration of "Ideas of Beauty" Ruskin made the proposition that beauty is instinctive. He had explained that impressions of beauty are neither intellectual nor sensual in their essence, but that "Ideas of Beauty" arise out of sensual experience to be received and apprehended by a higher faculty, distinct from, yet related to the intellect. When, in the second volume, Ruskin recalls these earlier definitions he considers the problem of sensation. He asks, "what difference of dignity may exist between different kinds of aesthetic or sensual pleasure, properly so called?" It is an important question, but no serious obstacles delay the answer.

First of all, he observes that the senses themselves divide into those of touch and taste, which are merely necessary for existence, and those of sight and sound, which are higher, in that they can provide pleasures that are good in themselves. Aristotle perceives this distinction in his *Ethics* (iii, 10, 2-4) and he is right, Ruskin thinks, in excluding from his description of "Intemperance" an excessive indulgence in the higher pleasures of sense. He is right because, though reason may become a slave to the pursuit of these pleasures, it is not essentially destroyed, whereas, an inordinate indulgence in the pleasures of touch and taste not only incapacitates reason but destroys the acuteness of these sensibilities themselves. Indeed, having quoted Aristotle to his pur-



pose Ruskin finds further confirmation of his opinion in Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*!

Thus the primary ground for a distinction between the impressions of sense is that which proves their indulgence to be contrary to reason: i.e., "their destructiveness upon prolongation." But having thus far explained and elaborated the old Aristotelian distinction, Ruskin offers an important addition. A second principle for discriminating between sensual impressions may be found in whether or not the pursuance of one kind of pleasurable indulgence may coexist with the pursuance of others, whether, in short, this or that pleasure may exist in harmony with others.

Now the lower senses, if indulged beyond the mere necessities of life, disturb the functional harmony of the organism, their unconsidered indulgence may be proved bad by trial. These lower senses are distinct from the higher in their very "incapacity of coexisting with the better delights and true perfections of the system." But this incapacity must be discovered by experience. So far as Ruskin can see, "trial and error" is the only certain method of judging the impressions of sense. By careful and frequent experiments one must attempt to find those impressions most permanent and those which are most consistently agreeable. The power we have over our preferences is not immediate but depends upon the acuteness of our attention over a long period. There is no absolute rule for our guidance; no certain authority but ourselves. We must expect great variation and change, results will appear to be unpredictable. Yet a definite tendency from variation "to unity of taste among the experienced" will ultimately be observed.

From these observations naturally follows the question how much power of rational choice have we over these preferences and how much moral responsibility do

we incur for choosing right? Now this, for Ruskin, was a delicate point, for it was important to his theory of art that moral responsibility should be introduced at the very roots of experience. One would have expected him to follow puritanical tradition in a denial of the value and the truth of immediate sense impressions, placing in them no trust at all. Indeed, everything in Ruskin's background argued against a frank recognition of the pleasures of sense. That road of observation led to the most abominable philosophy of materialism, a "dismal" philosophy which had no theory of the beautiful, whose disciples spoke "as if houses and lands, and food and raiment were alone useful, and as if Sight, Thought, and Admiration ("we live by admiration, hope and love") were all profitless, so that men insolently call themselves Utilitarians, who would turn, if they had their way, themselves and their race into vegetables . . ."

But Ruskin believed himself a "Naturalist," which was far from being a Utilitarian; he was certain of his fundamental faith. A naturalist, he said, "studies from nature", he is to be distinguished from a "Purist," on the one hand, and a "Sensualist," on the other. He recognizes the value of sensation but does not subordinate all his faculties to it. The Utilitarian, if he had a disciple among artists, would have been thrown into the latter class.<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, moreover, had read Lyell's theories, he had studied geology with some zeal and he was too much experienced in the pleasures of art to resort to a reasoned denial of the importance of sensual elements in experience. Moreover, he saw that he might follow certain Christian interpretations of the Aristotelian ethics. He had demonstrated his sensible naturalism by refusing seriously to consider German idealism, in Oxford he had remained entirely indifferent to the idealistic appeal of the Oxford Movement. Thus he believed himself capable

of guiding his steps over the narrow bridge above the materialistic abyss.

It seemed clear to Ruskin that an immediate impression of sense could not be considered false, nor could an immediate preference of one thing to another be called mistaken, "For no one," he wrote, "can be deceived respecting the actual sensation he perceives or prefers." But when we speak of a man as wrong we mean simply "that he feels differently from all, or from a majority, respecting a certain object, or that he prefers at present those of his impressions which ultimately he will not prefer." By "majority," in this connection, Ruskin really means a minority, or those who have a native acuteness, who are experienced in a greater rather than a less degree.

Thus he concludes that over immediate impressions of sense we have no real power of judgment and cannot, therefore, be said to incur moral responsibility, but with long time preferences or repeated impressions different conditions prevail. Because we can determine by trial and error those impressions which are permanent, those which can be enjoyed in due relation to other senses and functions and those which do not upset or disorganize the perfect system of our natures, we do incur a responsibility. Because we can determine, by experience, just those impressions of sense from which "the greatest amount of pleasure" may be derived, we may be said to incur a duty to do so. The very existence of a discriminative power which, over a long time, perceives the possible relation of the effects of different pleasures, which may increase the sensibility itself to a maximum capacity and which may judge clearly, this implies moral responsibility. For Ruskin held firmly that every power bestowed upon human nature necessarily incurred a duty.

The esthetic duty of mankind, then, is to perfect its

judgment of taste. Taste itself is instinctive and in its immediate preferences cannot be judged, but by repeated consideration of the results of these immediate preferences, over a long period, taste can and must be cultivated. Custom and habit are potent but dangerous forces in such cultivation, they may establish and carry on errors as well as true judgments. The degree of variation of taste in the individual and the group is tremendous, only an approximation can be taken as a workable and relative standard; but with constant attention, Ruskin believed, conclusions will come right in the end.

His Christian optimism plunged into the rankest center of materialistic observation. Conclusions will come right because all powers will mature and the operation of matured taste, Ruskin divined, was "an analogy to, and in harmony with, the whole spirit of the Christian moral system, and must ultimately love and rest in the great sources of happiness common to all the human race, and based on the relations they hold to their Creator" <sup>2</sup> It is an optimism derived from "Natural Theology."

So, by the aid of Aristotle, the example of Locke, the eloquence of Richard Hooker, his own observation and his own faith in a natural moral order, Ruskin crosses the precarious bridge from the dismal region of blind, variable preference to the realm of moral discrimination and spiritual hope. The progress itself contains hazards to the development of his theory of art, but it is also fundamental to it.

The ancient Aristotelian distinction between higher and lower senses is fundamental to his position, for art (which Ruskin thought led to a recognition of all that is best in life) could scarcely be based upon senses whose function was merely that of preserving animal existence. Elaborating this ancient doctrine, then, and reviving the traditional doctrine of temperance made it possible to

eliminate all sexual impressions from consideration. Yet, though it has excellent historical authority from Aristotle to Locke, such a division of sense was difficult to harmonize with a theory of purity such as Ruskin developed, for he conceived purity as essentially material, a kind of vitalism or energy of life, and he kept this concept, which will be explained below, an important central doctrine in his moral "system." Moreover, in the light of the psychological data upon sense variability, new theories of perception and the muscular reactions in the theory of "empathy," it would be impossible, without much qualification, to hold such a division of higher and lower senses today.

But Ruskin's observations are historically important. in spite of the Christian optimism tacked on at the close, he has followed out to a logical conclusion a relative theory of taste. Two points are of particular interest. He has admitted that, for the reason of the great variability in the sensual impressions of even the experienced beholder, and for the reason that it is impossible to be certain that two people are getting the same sensation from the same object, there can exist only an approximate standard of taste, actually based upon a long period of trial and error. This is something that the modern experimental psychologist is proud to prove scientifically, and it could not have been a happy admission for Ruskin to have to make.

Secondly, Ruskin's principle for evaluating and judging preferences, or, in short, for cultivating taste, is scarcely idealistic. He was well aware of the difficulty in proving to men that they "ought to like one thing rather than another";<sup>3</sup> yet he faced the necessity for doing so—for doing so, moreover, by an examination of the facts of sensual preference. In formulating this principle Ruskin falls most definitely in line with the Aristotelean

rather than the Platonic tendency in English thought he differs most sharply from Coleridge

The division of the senses is similar but Coleridge's basis for this division is much more involved Coleridge implies a possible universal criterion for taste because his theory of taste contained an intellectual element it relied upon the rational understanding with its laws of logic Ruskin had definitely ruled this out, he never resorted to the authority of reason. "No person of common reflection," says Coleridge, "demands even in feeling that what tastes pleasant to him ought to produce the same effect on all living beings; but every man does and must expect and demand the universal acquiescence of all intelligent beings in every conviction of his understanding" <sup>4</sup>

In contrast to this Ruskin approaches most closely to "rank empiricism" and most fully justifies his claim of "Naturalist." At this point also Ruskin is nearest the twentieth century in his esthetic speculation To justify his principles of discrimination on the grounds that they were a means to achieving "the greatest amount of pleasure" was a gesture alarmingly suggestive of Benthamite heresy. Then to insist that the preference for one variety of sensual pleasure must be judged by its due relation to the perfect operation of other senses was to imply a notion of the human mechanism as an organic system of functional impulses It is comparatively easy to see how he derived the principle of harmony from Aristotle's discussion of temperance, but it is not so easy to discover how or whence he got the notion of organized or systematized impulses. Nor is it easy to explain why this idea had never before been made the center for a theory of esthetic evaluation. It is not only an advance in esthetic speculation but an elementary forecast of the modern psychological "equilibrium" given by I A

Richards as the center of his chapter "A Psychological Theory of Value" in *Principles of Literary Criticism*

But Ruskin seems to have been aware that the hedonistic basis and the relative criterion of this theory of taste might seriously confuse the moral idealism which he had introduced into his explanation of the experience of the beautiful. Thus with increasing thickness he interpolated quotations from seventeenth century divines into his pages, they helped to camouflage the peril of the logical premises which he was following. Although he had succeeded in bringing sensual preferences or taste under a moral category, he could not be satisfied with his reliance upon the general hope that all preferences would come right in the end. He was already certain that the experience of beauty was a specialized type, one of high order, he had defined it as neither sensual nor intellectual and he realized that he must give an exposition of its "Theoretic" or "contemplative" nature. The esthetic duty of cultivating right preferences was thus described largely in moral terms, the quotations from Hooker and the Bible lent a tone of religious sanction to Ruskin's magical transformation of sense impressions into high emotions.

Having established a sensual basis for beauty and a relative criterion of taste, it was by rhetoric rather than reason that Ruskin described the higher levels of the experience of beauty. He postulated arbitrarily the fabulous psychological entities, "Theoria" and "Imagination," the special departments of that complete abstraction, the "Moral Faculty." Having done so, he could analyze experience above the region of sensation and could expatiate, with that absolute precision which alone satisfied him, upon the nice distinctions between universal emotions. Thus, indeed, could he betray his "Naturalism."

## THE THEORETIC OR CONTEMPLATIVE EXPERIENCE

The experience of beauty is not, therefore, limited to "aesthesia" or the mere experience of sensual impressions, nor is it, on the other hand, intellectual. It is moral. It involves the two departments of the "Moral Faculty." Its basis is instinctive, its essence of the soul. Old fashioned and awkward as it now sounds, this psychology<sup>5</sup> was not an unusual application of traditional views, for the moral faculty was believed to apprehend the spiritual order in the world of sense.

To understand the theoretical functions of "Contemplation" and "Imagination" in Ruskin's esthetics, it is necessary first to perceive that these high sounding names, which seem to stand for separate departments of the moral faculty, are nothing more than two obvious aspects of the experience of beauty—passive and active. "Contemplation" (or "Theoria") represents the highest level of the appreciative experience of a beholder, either before an object of art or before nature. "Imagination" represents the highest level of the creative experience of the artist, specifically, the poet and painter. The one consists in the appreciation, the other in the active construction of values from sense experience. Sensual beauty, the operation of taste or extended preference among the sensations of sight and sound form the necessary ground for the structure of the true esthetic.<sup>6</sup> Esthetic values, whether considered from the creative or from the appreciative aspect, arise out of "aesthesia" and become moral.

The sensations of taste and touch, as I have said, seemed to Ruskin inferior because he considered the faculties of taste and touch "subservient to life." Lower senses, he said, are the "instruments of our preservation"; their pleasures cannot be prolonged and remain conducive to health after their purely existential function is ful-



filled But the pleasures of sight and hearing are as gifts to us, they do not answer the purpose of our mere existence, they are "no means or instrument of life, but an object of life" They can be prolonged; "they are eternal and inexhaustible."

These higher pleasures of sense, then, do not lead to "a mere animal consciousness of pleasantness" which is what "aesthesia" should, according to Ruskin, properly mean Rather, because of the fact of their sufficiency, they lead to a spiritual element in experience, <sup>7</sup> for, said Ruskin, "God will not make anything an object of life to His creatures which does not point to, or partake of, Himself."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, those pursuits which are admirable in themselves and for their own sake (in other words, "Theoretic" pursuits) take rank above all pursuits whose "productions and discoveries" can be referred to a selfish use which might "interrupt the contemplation of things as they are"

The enjoyment of the pleasures of sight and sound thus leads to a contemplative experience Or, to put it precisely, when these impressions of sight are, as in works of art, "gathered together and so arranged to enhance each other as by chance they could not be" there occurs a unique kind of experience which is the contemplative (or "theoretic") experience of beauty In Ruskin's own words, "there is caused by them" (impressions of sight) "not only a feeling of strong affection towards the object in which they exist, but a perception therefore, of the immediate operation of the Intelligence which so formed us, and so feeds us" Out of this perception there arise the four great emotions which characterize the operation of the faculty called "Theoria," the faculty which experiences beauty. But lest a reader be drawn into a false understanding of these emotions, Ruskin observes specifically that they are in no way obtainable by intellect;

the perception of "the Intelligence which so formed us and so feeds us" is an instinctive perception

The very existence of an idea of beauty, therefore, is dependent upon certain emotions, for these are the moral features which distinguish the contemplative from the merely sensual experience of beauty, the "theoretic" from the "aesthetic." That they may appear less intangible Ruskin lists them in the order in which they appear in the act of appreciation. The beautiful object is met with joy, there is stimulated a genuine love of the object, then follows a gradual perception (one might more accurately call it intuition) of the kindness of the superior intelligence, giving rise to a great awe or admiration. Finally thankfulness or veneration, directed toward the Divine Intelligence, overwhelms the self, the experience is complete. All this is of course dependent not upon any particular state of mere sensibility or mere intellect but "on a pure, right, and open state of the heart." The experience of beauty, then, is very similar to experience of religious truth; the emotions are parallel to stages in religious experience.

But Ruskin will not call attention to the religious character of his esthetic. He believes that the "state of the heart" is a moral not a religious condition. So too the emotions—joy, love, awe, veneration—are essentially moral, though they may appear in various religions. Thus in the final analysis ideas of beauty are shown to be moral, for they arise through the senses and achieve emotional value, they are to be distinguished from other ideas by the emotions present to him who experiences them. Over and over again Ruskin stresses this fact. He holds that the experience of beauty is in its fullest and most Christian significance a supreme moral act. Over and over he declares that the fullness of sensibility, the

breadth of perception, the depth of imagination are dependent upon the acuteness of the moral nature

But in this connection a striking fact catches the reader's eye and may lead him to perceive one of Ruskin's prevailing characteristics. The majority of descriptions of actual experience of the beautiful which occur in Ruskin's works are descriptions of his emotions at beholding natural scenery rather than painted landscape and, much too often for the good of his theory of painting, Ruskin turns from the picture being discussed to a description of the scenes beheld by his own eyes. One of the best examples I can recall, makes very clear the mystical or "supernatural" element in his own contemplative or "theoretic" experience

"Suddenly, there came in the direction of Dome Du Goûter a crash—of prolonged thunder, and when I looked up, I saw the cloud cloven, as it were by the avalanche. Spire of ice—dome of snow—wedge of rock—*all* fire in the light of the sunset, sank into the hollows of the crags—and pierced through the prisms of the glaciers, and dwelt within them—as it does in clouds. The ponderous storm writhed and moaned beneath them, the forest wailed and waved in the evening wind, the steep river flashed and leaped along the valley, but the mighty pyramids stood calmly—in the very heart of the high heaven—a celestial city with walls of amethyst and gates of gold—filled with the light and clothed with the Peace of God. And then I learned—what till then I had not known—the real meaning of the word Beautiful. With all that I had ever seen before—there had come mingled the associations of humanity—the exertion of human power—the action of human mind. The image of self had not been effaced in that of God. It was then only beneath those glorious hills that I learned how thought itself may become ignoble and energy itself become base—when compared with the absorption of soul and spirit—the prostration of all power—and the cessation of all will—before, and in the Presence of, the manifested Deity

It was then only that I understood that to become nothing might be to become more than Man,—how without desire—without memory—without sense even of existence—the very sense of its own lost in the perception of a mightier—the immortal soul might be held for ever—impotent as a leaf—yet greater than tongue can tell—wrapt in the one contemplation of the Infinite God It was then that I understood that all which is the type of God's attributes—which in any way or in any degree—can turn the human soul from gazing upon itself—can quench in it pride—and fear—and annihilate—be it even so small a degree, the thoughts and feelings which have to do with this present world, and fix the spirit—in all humility—on the types of that which is to be its food for eternity,—this and this only is in the pure and right sense of the word BEAUTIFUL ”<sup>9</sup>

The irony of Ruskin's assurance that he was concerned with the natural facts of appearance becomes obvious in the light of such a description It is clear that however much he attempted to observe and to draw his conclusions from esthetic facts, he is capable of interpolating abstractions into his argument at any convenient point, without perceiving the logical discrepancies which arise Quotations from Aristotle, Hooker and the Bible appear in the same paragraph confirming generalizations supposedly derived from observation An investigation of sense data is almost certain to end with a perception of Divine Intelligence Yet such reasoning was typical of the naturalistic theology common to religious and poetic minds in Ruskin's period It was not alien to the accepted reasoning of scientists in Oxford and Cambridge God made the world and man, and if the contemplation of a painting could stimulate worshipful emotion, how much more should not the analysis of beauty in God's own painting lead to ecstasy of spirit? Thus a modern reader must accustom himself to extremes of statement which

sometimes suggest contradictions even within the limits of Ruskin's theoretical position

An historical explanation for this kind of rationalizing is by no means impossible. A respect for the data of sense had, as I have said, been curiously combined with moral abstractions in English criticism of art and literature. The belief that poetry and fine art offered men specific religious benefit was common even in the age of Deism. John Dennis' theory of poetic beauty relied, just as Ruskin's, upon a set of high emotions,<sup>10</sup> though Dennis' scheme is elementary in comparison. Baillie and Burke, the Scotch school, Alison—all referred to the higher moral and religious values connected with the sublime. The nature enthusiasts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century differed principally in enlarging the literary scope of nature and recognizing a new type of landscape painting. The tradition of high passion continued. Even Browning with his realistic sense of fact and his shrewd recognition of psychological foibles suggests, in 1855 in *The Guardian Angel*, a theory of beauty which relies upon high, noble or moral emotions. It is art, the picture of the guardian angel, which inspires the beholder to see

"The world, as God has made it. All beauty  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty"

The naturalism which Ruskin espoused was thus in no sense unusual but within it there lay a theoretical difficulty never satisfactorily resolved. One may accept, for example, the erroneous psychology of the "Faculties," the schematization of "Aesthetic," "Theoretic" and "Moral" departments by which Ruskin defines the particular character of his appreciative experience, but how is it possible to reconcile "the perception of the Intelligence" which seems to cause the emotions of love, ad-

miration and gratitude, with the denial, in chapter nineteen of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, that we receive pleasure from objects of beauty "because they are illustrative of His nature"? Ruskin himself made the reconciliation easily. The attitude of worship characteristic of his "natural religion" extended over what he preferred to call his belief in a moral order. This belief did not, so far as esthetics went, involve any definite religion, it was furthermore instinctive, not intellectual. But in stressing this separation of appreciation from reason, Ruskin avoided an intellectual formalism only to succumb to mysticism of emotion that had less than no definition.

If on the one hand the emotional perception of natural beauty involves no intellectual symbolism, and on the other the pleasure is not caused by the perception of God's attributes in nature, then the experience itself rests on an emotional mystery that resists the touch of analysis. Moreover, if it is the beauty of moral law which we contemplate and if the constituents of beauty are essentially moral elements, his argument runs in a circle. It is one thing to introduce the Deity or a universal order of morality as the source of esthetic pleasure (in a causal sense), but quite another to make these universals the very substance of beauty—the objects perceived or intuited. God may well be the cause of beauty, but by no reasonable argument can it therefore be said that God is beauty.

This is just the sort of problem, by the way, which the German estheticians and Coleridge puzzled over—i.e., the relations between the intuitive self, the universal and the object held as beautiful. It was at this point (as Shawcross observes) that Coleridge failed to relate his naturalistic theology to the intellectual esthetics which he borrowed from Schelling. Ruskin met the same sort of failure, but for different reasons. Having con-

sciously avoided the metaphysical contours of the neo-Platonic theory of beauty, he reached an emotional version of neo-Platonism itself. He needed, to fill up his hollow "Ideas of Beauty," an intellectual symbolism or a German metaphysic which his English "natural idealism," as distinct from what he calls "Purism," could not permit him to accept.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to see how a perception of "Divine Intelligence" could be said to exist without an *a priori* concept of Deity, and such a concept must be considered intellectual. It is furthermore, quite beyond reason to talk about the emotion of love, however much rationalized, without admitting some degree of sensual, even erotic, feeling. But Ruskin would not admit intellect and could not allow sexuality in beauty. The emotional constituents of beauty were thus left without an intellectual or a specific psychological character. "Ideas of Beauty" are, so far as esthetics go, emotions, vaguely religious and symbolically moral.

#### POPULAR FALLACIES REFUTED

Ruskin was not interested in the history of esthetics. He did not attempt to define his own views in relation to his theoretical predecessors. But he was interested in putting the ghosts of old ideas to rest, and more interested in stripping the disguise from a current theory that pretended to be more true than he thought it. He had inevitably met theories of beauty counter to his own, he had encountered conventional attitudes and phrases which implied the very opposite of what he discovered beauty to be, but he seems never to have really studied them. They annoyed him and to clear the ground he gathered them swiftly together, simplified them, and composed a refutation of each.

At the close of his exposition of the "Theoretic" appreciation of beauty, he reviews four popular theories. Had he known more of the origin of these attitudes, he might have stated their arguments more accurately. But he was writing for the welfare of his fellow beings. He was impetuous with certainty. He could not waste words in argument, he had so much more to say. For only one theory, therefore, does he bother to find a specification; the others are stated generally without reference. His pages are gestures rather than refutations of current and traditional views.

The opinion that the beautiful is the true must have annoyed Ruskin particularly for he had so carefully distinguished artistic truth from beauty in his introductory division of "Ideas." Such an opinion at any rate is the first to be attacked. People who believe that beauty is truth, Ruskin says, must mean that "Things are beautiful which appear what they are, and ugly which appear what they are not." But in so thinking they are obviously contradicted by experience, for how could they explain a mirage on this basis, or any fanciful type of beauty, moreover, how could such a theory account for the degrees of beauty among natural things—a stone compared to a rose?

A little reflection will reveal the weakness of such refutation. In the first place it is mere casuistry to reduce the theoretical suggestions in the statement "The beautiful is the true" to the phrase itself. It is obvious that if the dictum means anything, it suggests the Platonic or the neo-Platonic positions in esthetics and might involve several of Ruskin's own extravagant statements upon the importance of representative truth to art. Ruskin's attempt to account for the difference in degrees of beauty in natural things is perhaps the most preposterous part of his esthetic venture, it may be questioned whether



"degrees of beauty" in reference to natural things outside the world of art has any possible meaning at all

But Ruskin seems to have considered his refutation final. He turns to the second popular phantom which he characterises by the definition, "The beautiful is the useful." A number of traditional opinions are suggested by the sentence. It could refer to that portion of Hogarth's theory which deals with the beauty of necessary and useful parts of animals, which claims a logical connection between fine proportion and utility. It suggests also similar arguments in the writings of Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Crousaz. But Ruskin, I believe, is thinking of utilitarian morals and their possible esthetic extensions. His condemnation is reasonable only in the light of such reference.

The "Opinion from utility," he insists, has no facts to support it. It implies "that the most beautiful productions of nature are seeds and roots, and of art, spades and millstones." The doctrine is pernicious in its far-reaching denial of all real beauty and in its confusion of the useful (in the sense of those things which merely promote life), with those divinely given things which are enjoyable for their or their maker's sake. Indeed such a philosophy is diabolical. "It is to confound admiration with hunger, love with lust, and life with sensation." The sentences themselves betray the violence behind them.

Righteous indignation, however, did not at this time supply the refutation which the claims of utility deserved. Both thesis and criticism appear no less general than my paraphrase. But a corollary of utilitarian theory receives more explicit criticism. As Ruskin knew, the opinion that beauty arose from familiarity had attracted Reynolds' interest and was considerably held "in Dr. Johnson's time." He was certain, nevertheless, that ex-

perience did not warrant this generalization Custom, he said, works in two ways Custom often deadens sensation itself, it often confirms affection With repulsive things, for example, the repulsiveness is sometimes diminished while a gradual claim upon morbid affection increases With beautiful things, custom neither creates nor destroys the essence of their beauty, nor can it be seen to produce it. Beauty therefore cannot even be said to subsist through custom.

Such reasoning is better than the rhetorical denunciation spent upon the preceding opinions, but it is not so detailed as the attack which follows upon the theory of association itself. With this Ruskin was more familiar He had unconsciously taken over a number of its minor tenets, for he had read Alison's *Essay* with annoyance, and Burke's famous treatise had given him cause for reflection. But Ruskin oversimplifies the associative theory of beauty in his effort to refute its first principles It is, he says, the opinion that "agreeableness in objects which we call beautiful is the result of the Association with them of agreeable or interesting ideas" Stated in this fashion the doctrine is easily and summarily knocked down. It involves a false syllogism which runs:

"Association gives pleasure  
Beauty gives pleasure  
Therefore Association is Beauty"

Furthermore, says Ruskin, a second fallacy is evident in another statement of the same false theory: "The Power of Association is stronger than the Power of Beauty, therefore, the Power of Association is the Power of Beauty."

Now Ruskin's paraphrases are sheer distortion, but they are effective From them he continues his analysis

of popular error. If we examine association, he says, we shall find it of two sorts. "Rational" and "Accidental" "Rational Association" (and he implies that Alison so uses the term) is "the interest which any object may bear historically, as having been in some way connected with the affairs or affections of men, an interest shared in the minds of all who are aware of such connections" To call this beauty "is mere gross confusion of terms, it is no theory to be confuted, but a misuse of language to be set aside, a misuse involving the positions that in uninhabited countries the vegetation has no grace, the rock no dignity, the cloud no colour, and that the snowy summits of the Alps receive no loveliness from the sunset light, because they have not been polluted by the wrath, ravage, and misery of men"

As Ruskin has sketched the theory it is far from Alison's, his version, so far as I can discover, did not exist in his own time or in the eighteenth century. Only by a careless reading of Price and Payne Knight could one believe it theirs It could be used only as a justification for historical painting and sculpture where the literary subject matter has become the prime concern In this way it suggests certain arguments used by Opie and Fuseli But even the Academicians who indulged in historical delineation had further grounds than the "Rational Association," as defined by Ruskin, upon which to base their practice So, too, had the defenders of the picturesque Yet Ruskin has Alison in mind<sup>12</sup>

He attempts in this way to boil down Alison's whole theory of esthetic into the limited and abstract "Rational Association," because he fails to understand the scope of Alison's psychology In none of his allusions to Alison's theory is there evidence that Ruskin either comprehended it or seriously refuted it This is particularly interesting because a second type of association, which Ruskin calls

"Accidental," he considers to be profoundly related to our experience of beauty (in that it has great significance to "the moral system"). Yet this type of association is very definitely one part of the "train of thought" which Alison examines. Even Lauder, who follows Alison in his *Essay on the Origin of Taste*, recognizes the degree to which moral sentiment is involved with association.

Ruskin defines "Accidental Association" as "the accidental connection of ideas and memories with material things, owing to which those material things are regarded as agreeable or otherwise, according to the nature of the feelings or recollections they summon, the association being commonly involuntary and often so vague as that no distinct image is suggested by the object, but we feel a painfulness in it or pleasure from it, without knowing wherefore." He observes that this type of association has caused "inextricable embarrassments on the subject of beauty." He does not think "that the minor degrees and shades of this great influence have been sufficiently appreciated." He enlarges upon its importance: he says, "I believe that the eye cannot rest on a material form, in a moment of depression or exaltation, without communicating to that form a spirit and a life—a life which will make it afterwards in some degree loved or feared—a charm or painfulness for which we shall be unable to account even to ourselves, which will not indeed be perceptible, except by its delicate influence on our judgment in cases of complicated beauty."

But this is just the kind of taste for "complicated beauty" that Alison made an attempt to explain. It is, moreover, this sort of association which conditions the particular form of Ruskin's elevated "Emotions"—those emotions which, in the "Theoretic" experience, distinguish beauty from mere sensual pleasure. The fact that he read Alison and remained unaware of the application

of the theory to himself is an ironical illustration of his own blind or unconscious associations. There could be few statements made more completely in agreement with Alison's tenets than that in Ruskin's second volume: "And there is probably no one opinion which is formed by any of us, in matters of taste, which is not in some degree influenced by unconscious association of this kind."

Ruskin argues, however, that though these associations are "natural," relating to the physical laws of the universe (a point which Alison doubts, pointing to the variability in customs of different countries) they have "not any power in *producing* beauty." His explanation is largely verbal. Such associations, he says, "only give to beauty, when otherwise produced, its *character*. They make it melancholy beauty—tender beauty—or brilliant beauty, but they do not produce the beauty itself."<sup>13</sup>

Though such declarations contradict Alison's views, they in no way refute them. It remains for Ruskin to show in what way the "*character* of beauty" is distinct from the essence. This, in his explanation of contemplation ("Theoria") he has not done, but he comes closer to it in his theory of formal unity for imagination. Yet a nice irony lies in the fact that the formal imaginative unity which Ruskin postulates could easily be shown to depend upon blended associations, and that the high emotions of "Theoretic" beauty might be shown to consist of nothing else. Whether or not Alison distinguished between sensual and spiritual beauty, is, after all, aside from the point. Ruskin used more than once a psychological approach toward an explanation of "the impressions of beauty in the mind"; had he taken advantage of Alison's contributions in this respect he could scarcely have rested with so preposterous an explanation as that which he offers for the contemplative appreciation of beauty and for

imagination His superficial study of the then recent esthetics undoubtedly influenced his theory, but in an opposite direction Alison probably confused rather than clarified his analysis of emotions

### THE SUBLIME

It is difficult to realize how Ruskin, who professed such interest in facts, who held in theory so tenaciously to the creed of the naturalist, could tolerate in imaginative art the vagaries of supernaturalism and religious idealism which he found in Gothic, in early Florentine and in Pre-Raphaelite art But he had never quite outgrown the adolescent sentiment which appears in an early letter to a college friend “. . . if you banish obscurity from your language you banish all description of human emotion, beyond such simple notions as that your hero is in a fury or a fright.”<sup>14</sup>

The esthetic implications of such sentiments are quite inconsistent with the prevailing emphasis upon the real in his theories His two tendencies, one hurrying him to facts and the other off to worlds of emotional ideality, brought about curious views, especially when he came to reflect upon those famous touchstones of esthetic, “The Sublime” and “The Picturesque” How could he admit these unrealistic though elevating notions into the hard rationalistic categories of his “Five Ideas”? How, on the other hand, could he with any respect for his own emotional experience, leave them out?

What he does is to deny the term sublime any specific validity as representing a particular class of ideas in art, he regards it as a mere mode or manifestation of “Beauty” or “Relation.” He proceeds to attack the eighteenth century notions of sublimity with Burke as the particular target This, though his method differs, follows

Dugald Stewart. But having accomplished his demolition of Burke, he doubles back and with the help of his Wordsworthian mysticism reads considerable import into sublime experience itself, holding nevertheless his fundamental position of its secondary place

The argument is not difficult to follow "Anything," says Ruskin, "which elevates the mind is sublime, and elevation of mind is produced by the contemplation of greatness of any kind, but chiefly of course by the greatness of the noblest things" Thus, the sublime is not distinct from what is material, special, powerful, virtuous, or beautiful, it is merely a way of experiencing these "ideas" Burke, he thinks, was very ingenious in his theory which related the sublime to the instinct of fear and beauty to the instinct of pleasure, it was clever to support these opinions by observing a contraction of the muscles in the first case and a relaxation in the second But Burke lost the central point of his argument in observing physical details It is not sensation which characterizes the experience of beauty or the sublime, it is the emotion arising from the sensation. We are exalted "not because peril and pain are sublime in their own nature, but because their contemplation, exciting compassion or fortitude, elevates the mind, and renders meanness of thought impossible" <sup>15</sup>

Burke, in resting his analysis upon sensation itself, inevitably connects the sublime with the instinct of self-preservation, making the sublime and beauty natural and inevitable experiences arising from the conditions of mere existence. To one so certain as Ruskin of the superior value of emotion this was profoundly erroneous For if Ruskin admitted any connection between an esthetic idea and self-interest or material preservation he would have contradicted his belief in the non-utilitarian character of beauty His psychological distinction between emotion

and sensuality was that emotion, passion, sentiment belonged to the moral rather than the material side of human nature. He did not divorce mind from matter or deny to contemplation its natural roots in sense. His contention was that to give the fullest meaning to the term life, one must read emotional meaning into existence.

It is thus the contemplation of the greatness of any idea, not the mere instinctive fear, which constitutes the sublime experience. The very fact that a coward is least capable of such an experience proves that self-preservation has little or nothing to do with it. Burke, Ruskin felt, was ignorant of the true meaning of the ideal in art, for he insisted that "littleness" was a necessary element of beauty, but it is quite obvious that sublime ideas, which Burke argues are always great, are often also beautiful.

Sublimity and beauty, though distinct, are not altogether inseparable, in their extreme forms they have something in common. "The sublimity of the vast forms of Egyptian sculpture is enhanced or diminished, in proportion as the lines approach the standards of that peculiar beauty which is characteristic of them. A mere monster, however vast in size, could scarcely ever induce an impression of sublimity." The highest beauty is always therefore sublime, and the highest sublimity, beautiful.

At this point Ruskin leaves his criticism of Burke to explain his own view. Contemplation involves sympathy and so necessarily does the sublime. "Anything which being itself great, makes us great by the sympathy we have with it is sublime." It is this sympathy, this contemplative reference to ourselves or to man as the measure of greatness which, although unconscious, defines the sublime as a particular mode or way of imaginative contemplation.<sup>16</sup> But having no psychological explana-



tion for sympathy, Ruskin raised it to a mystical region and made it an avenue of religious feeling. He interpolated a kind of mysticism. In every manifestation of greatness, of energy, of destruction, or of overwhelming power, he says, "there are addressed to the senses such accompanying phenomena of sublime form and sound and colour that the mind instantaneously traces some ruling sympathy that conquers the apathy of the elements, and feels through the inanition of nature the supernatural unity of God."

In this way Ruskin brings the sublime into his theoretic system: it is within the province of the theoretic faculty. But at the same time Ruskin has given the experience a secondary place in his esthetic, it is not one of the fundamental "Ideas" which art conveys, but a subsidiary mode connected with these ideas. In doing this he contradicts Alison, Price, Lauder and in a general way repeats Dugald Stewart,<sup>17</sup> who held that "the sublime and the picturesque" were "qualifying epithets to limit the meaning of the generic name of Beauty in particular instances."

#### THE PICTURESQUE

Ruskin's reflections upon the nature of "The Sublime" aid in understanding his criticism of that very popular vogue in painting, architecture and landscape gardening called "The Picturesque." Forty odd years intervened between the publication of Price's *Essay* and the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. The epithet picturesque had descended from the intelligentsia into general and even common use. The principles which explained this so-called esthetic experience of mixed, sentimental and often unbeautiful scenes of rural country, desolated ruins or aged human figures in peasant surroundings were based on qualities opposed to those which charac-

terized the beautiful on the one hand the sublime on the other. They were also, as I have said, based on emotional associations of modified fear, of pity and of gentle awe.

Now Ruskin had little patience with this Dutch-Italian-English landscape and less with the theories that went to explain it. In the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* he deliberately reduces the picturesque to what he calls "an undeveloped state of the contemplative." He points to the fact that the picturesque is often conceived to display the skill of the artist, that it therefore lacks sincerity of imagination and has no profound sentiment. Later <sup>18</sup> he condemns the whole movement: "The picturesque school of art," he says, "rose up to address those capacities of enjoyment for which, in sculpture, architecture, or the higher walks of painting, there was employment no more." He had already in 1843 made his complaint that "the modern feeling based rather on strangeness of occurrence than on any real affection for them" (natural objects) "is certainly so shallow and ineffective as to be instantly and always sacrificed by the majority to fashion", and he had made the historical observation that the "increased demand for slighter works of art . . . and the quality of objects now called *picturesque*, . . . appears to be exclusively of modern origin." Technically, his eye was irritated by the absence of good design and the presence of artificial or academic composition in many of these works; thus, generalizing his annoyance, he declared that "it is one of the principal faults in the landscapes of the present day, that the symmetry of nature is sacrificed to irregular picturesqueness."

But anyone could see that both Prout and Turner, whom Ruskin worshipped, often sacrificed symmetry to other qualities; that both indulged in wild, rugged land-

scape and delighted in architectural ruins and picturesque effect, that Turner, in fact, made his fortune out of them. Perhaps Ruskin himself was troubled by the generality of his impulsive censures. In the fourth volume of *Modern Painters*, which is very largely devoted to Turner, he had claimed that the picturesque "so far as it consists in a delight in ruin, is perhaps the most suspicious and questionable of all the characters distinctly belonging to our temper, and art." He felt he ought therefore to explain the obvious picturesque intentions of Turner. So, in the chapter called "The Turnerian Picturesque" Ruskin considers with extreme gravity "the precise form under which he" (Turner) "admitted into his work the modern feeling of the picturesque." As an aid to his casuistry, Ruskin recalls a definition of the picturesque which he had been forced to concede in his criticism of Gothic. Upon this he contrives to distinguish between a school of "surface picturesque" represented by Stanfield, and a "higher school" represented by Prout and Turner. The distinction involves his theory of the sublime.

The essence of the picturesque in its highest or noblest sense is emotional, it is related to the contemplative act through its achievement of sublime character. But this sublime character in the highest picturesque objects Ruskin considers "to be a sublimity not inherent in the nature of the thing, but caused by something external to it; as the ruggedness of a cottage roof possesses something of a mountain aspect, not belonging to the cottage as such. And this sublimity may be either in mere external ruggedness, . . . or it may lie deeper, in an expression of sorrow and old age, attributes which are both sublime. . . ."

Behind the external factors of ruggedness, behind the "outward delightfulness" which consists in the variety of color and form, in the "complex light and shade" of

perfectly natural objects, lie the moral roots of nobility In the noble picturesque there is always "the expression

of suffering, of poverty, or decay, nobly endured by unpretending strength of heart." Even buildings in Turner's representation of them seem to "endure" The emptiness of mere ruggedness and variety is perfectly illustrated by comparing a "heartless" representation of an old mill by Stanfield, with a "sympathetic" drawing of a similar subject by Turner "The picturesqueness," Ruskin insists, "is in the unconscious suffering" <sup>19</sup>

Rationalized prejudice though it is, Ruskin's argument is a fair extension of his theory of the sublime The interesting thing about it is the degree to which Ruskin has been forced to follow not only the characteristics of the picturesque already conventionally described by Lauder and Price before him, but even the emotional associations or "instantaneous" suggestions which Lauder takes over from Alison's theories Sentiments, even pathetic fallacies, are ostentatiously scattered through Ruskin's descriptions of paintings by Turner; and they are no less "associative" for the fact that he gathers them up in the "contemplative" category of his theory He thought that putting such sentiments under the "Theoretic" faculty made them at once ideal and real Yet no adequate definition of "Contemplation" itself was ever given It was merely characterized by the vague and half-religious emotions of admiration, awe, love and gratitude, the very nests of Ruskin's own unconscious associations The ill-defined "Contemplation" turns up, therefore, at the most embarrassing moments to trouble and confuse what would otherwise be interesting theory and valuable criticism of painting

## WEAK LINKS AND STRONG IN THE THEORY OF BEAUTY

In Ruskin's day the haze of English poetry hung sweetly over the intellectual vision, theology and sentiment softened, even for scientists, the hard patterns of nature. It was almost inevitable that Ruskin should hold these great, half-religious emotions at the center of his theory, it was characteristic of his period and his temperament that he should leave them shining like the clear mists in his favorite Turner water colors. Furthermore, his failure to expose the very heart of his theory is not uncommon to theorists who find in emotion the meaning of the experience called esthetic. Emotions themselves are about as vague as any objects of thought. Modern emotionalist theories do little more than Ruskin's to clarify the nature of esthetic pleasure, emotion, feeling, and it must be said that the modern theorists have neither sentiment nor theology to contend with.

A clear definition of "Contemplation" would have required, as I have said, a symbolism of intellectual ideas or a metaphysics such as Coleridge relied upon, only one or the other would have distinguished the experience of beauty from the associative "train of thought" which the psychological theorists claimed that it comprised. But Ruskin had denied the intellectual nature of beauty and accounted for thoughts in art by a separate classification, his "Ideas of Relation." His later discussions of these literary, moral and supernatural notions do to some extent compensate for the specific weakness of his theory of beauty; yet the dividing line between the two departments becomes less clear as his theory develops.

Ruskin's serious theoretical weakness lies more in the nature of the whole moral scheme which he used than in the refusal to accept an intellectual explanation of

beauty The morality upon which beauty rests—the scheme of values behind the great emotions which distinguish his “Theoretic” from mere “Aesthetic” experience—contains irreconcilable conflicts The effect of these conflicts upon his criticism was profound; many of the pronouncements which today characterize Ruskin as “a consummate ass” arise from them

When Ruskin, for example, met certain subjects in art, such as the miser’s musical lament for his lost gold or the ordinary mortal’s delight in the beauty of a nude body, he was at once prevented from following his real theory. His experience of the object of art was judged truly or falsely esthetic, not by the emotion, for this was too vague to serve, but by the moral *propriety* of the subject matter If the gold were a buttercup and the body a swan’s all was well, but the facts too often revealed just metal and flesh So, as Ruskin went on with the experience of art he found much gold and more nakedness which had to be passed by with lowered eyes

Having based a theory upon emotions, his own judgment of art became inaccurate, confused, even dishonest, because his preconceived moral opinions would not let him face the terrifying facts of latent eroticism or the hopeless variability and vagueness of emotions themselves. Genuine investigation of his own emotions was very nearly impossible for one moulded by his environment and training. He was brought up in the evangelical habits of Protestantism; he was encouraged into the byways of natural theology at Oxford; his feelings were anything but flexible they had been bound to certain patterns of puritanical propriety. Such patterns were constantly shaping his prejudices; his feelings were continually turning into childlike attitudes Beyond the boundaries of his arrested “moral sense” his perception of truth and his emotional apprehension could not reach

These inner oppositions form the warp of Ruskin's theory, their historical significance will appear more fully in the following chapters. The rich surface of his speculation, however, reveals interesting features which are relevant to modern achievements in theorizing about art. It may be observed that Ruskin has slighted in his consideration of beauty the pleasure arising from the perception of deft workmanship. He separated it from beauty as distinctly as he divorced from beauty all literary, religious and intellectual ideas. At his time this was decidedly untraditional, it was un-Aristotelian, it was unclassical. One may further observe that just as "the characteristic truth" called for a unified concept of an object, so beauty calls for a unified, emotional contemplation. A mere sum of sensuous impressions does not suffice, nor does a scientific knowledge of the object. Characteristic of modern theories though this is, it is uncharacteristic of the English eighteenth century traditions.

But the most progressive feature of Ruskin's exposition of beauty is his observation upon the feelings of a beholder when appreciating a work of art. He lists among the emotions which characterize the beholder's attitude a "love of the object" and in the passage which describes the scene in Switzerland quoted above, it is clear that Ruskin in his exaltation emotionally projects himself into the scene.<sup>20</sup> Such mystical unification through "love" Ruskin considers typical of the highest contemplative experience of beauty. His is the first notation that I have come upon in English esthetics of that important psychological projection or identification, common to romantic poetry or painting, which the modern esthetician has so generally exploited.

Moreover, this belief in the esthetic importance of love is the chief reason why Ruskin considered the experience

of beauty unselfish and unutilitarian. Though a beautiful work of art is ultimately useful, in "the true" sense of the term, the appreciation of it can never be subservient to self-interest or material wants. Here, most clearly revealed, is Ruskin's reliance upon mysticism, the obliteration of the self before the object, the well-known poetic notion of contemplative concentration. Here too Ruskin stands at the portal of the purest idealism, for, having denied the doctrine of association, he has no realistic or "naturalist" psychology to use. With the limited psychology of his day he finds this selfless love of beauty supernatural and inexplicable.

Finally, Ruskin achieved a very real gain upon the esthetic theories precedent to and contemporary with his own by closing the long debate over the sublime. His separation of intellectual ideas from beauty and his extension of the province of beauty over the whole range of moral emotion forced the sublime, traditionally based upon feeling or sensation as it was, into the category of impressions which constituted beauty. The fact that he followed traditional descriptions in admitting that the sublime was dependent upon "greatness" made it easier to minimize its esthetic importance. He could argue convincingly that it was merely to be associated with other emotional experiences of a sensational type. If it took on intellectual association, these could be relegated to "Ideas of Relation," not "Ideas of Beauty"; otherwise it was merely one mode of beauty, significant not as a pure esthetic element but as it contributed to the emotions constituting the experience of beauty.

Accepting the psychology of the period, the religious attitude toward nature, the universality of moral sense, there was no good refutation of Ruskin's position. After the publication of the third volume of *Modern Painters* it is difficult to find one discussion of the sublime in Eng-



lish criticism or theory Ruskin had turned speculative attention to other abstractions more relevant to Victorian life he went on discussing the relation of natural truth to Victorian art and the "proper dependence" of Victorian art upon morals

SHAWCROSS, J. Edition of Coleridge's *Biographia literaria* Oxford 1907 (particularly the Introduction)

Among the modern works on esthetics listed in the bibliography at the close of chapter iv above, I am particularly indebted to

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## PART II

### MORALS AND IMAGINATION



## CHAPTER I

### NATURE AND GOD

#### NATURALIST SENTIMENT

RUSKIN's moral philosophy was in no way original. It contained the usual rhetorical jumble of moral notions in the head of any young university graduate who had fallen into line with one or more of the popular attitudes in theology, science and morals. But theology, science and morals, were, at this period, not only complicated by a variety of influences, they were hopelessly mixed up with one another. The eighteen thirties and forties saw the development of a conscious and deliberate reaction against the loose behavior of the Georgian reigns and the rational skepticism of such hard heads as Paley and Bentham in theology and ethics. While Cambridge had fallen prey to the Utilitarian principles, Pauline doctrine and Christianized interpretations of Aristotle had been kept alive in Edinburgh and Oxford.

With the ascendance to the chair of theology at Edinburgh in 1828 of the powerful Thomas Chalmers,<sup>1</sup> evangelicism received definite acceleration. Carlyle later described this worthy as a "man of little culture, of narrow sphere all his life." Another divine, Dr. Thomas Scott, swung violently from Unitarianism to Calvinism and exerted, through his *Commentary*, an influence upon the satellites of the Oxford Movement. Newman, in the *Apologia*, declares that he almost owed his soul to him. There were many others who, like Edward Irving, Daniel

Wilson and the comparatively broad Thomas Arnold of Rugby, exploited the sense of sin in young men's hearts, believed the Scriptures inspired, and objectified evil with quite as earnest if not as vivid a style as the notorious fathers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their sermons were read far beyond their parishes and their opinions helped to form the attitudes of many eminent Victorians. "Carlyle, Macaulay, Browning, Ruskin and George Eliot," according to Hugh Walker, "all came under Calvinistic influences . . . and all bore to the end the marks of their early training and association."

But evangelicism was not the only religious force influencing the minds of young men before 1840. Another moral and theological attitude, quite as antithetical to the Utilitarianism of Locke and the rational theology of Paley but distinct from Calvinism, was given tremendous impetus by Coleridge, by his followers Maurice and Kingsley and by such Noetics as Coplestone, the brilliant Richard Whately and the later broad churchmen Julius Hare, Jowett and Mark Pattison. These men felt the influence of German Idealism, Coleridge of Kant, Fichte and particularly of Schelling, and others (especially John Caird of Edinburgh and Jowett) of Hegel. Hare, Jowett and Pattison, however, were all erudite, classical scholars and combined with a study of modern German theories a continued and enthusiastic devotion to Plato.

For many, however, there was no sharp segregation of Calvinistic tenets from those of a more learned idealism. The popular enthusiasm for nature had borrowed explanations of man and his universe from traditional theology, from philosophy, from eighteenth century science and from poetry. The most curious compromise of new views with old was the anomalous attitude of the modern "naturalist." The professors of science during Ruskin's early years clung to an antiquated and even reactionary

theology The "Nature" of the romantic poets was probed and exploited by a group of university men who considered themselves scientific rather than inspirational. They described and classified the phenomena of the external world with valuable precision, but induced conclusions that amounted to a revival of "the natural religion" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

At Cambridge by 1830 there had been established "a flourishing Benthamite party among the students." Courses in Moral Philosophy had for some years been based upon Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*; the result was a school of opinion both unromantic and atheistical in tendency. "Some of the Dons," says Emery Neff, in his excellent account of this phase of the thought of the period, "were alarmed to see many of their charges seduced by doctrines they believed pernicious; it was Adam Sedgwick, Professor of Geology, who, in a series of sermons delivered in December, 1832, opened the assault upon these dangerous books" <sup>2</sup>

Sedgwick, a geologist of excellent standing in the British Association and a very Christian man, affirmed that "the moral government of God is by general laws, and that it is our bounden duty to study those laws." He honored the discoveries of Newton, but would have his hearers realize that true science was not merely the study of material forces in "a repulsive language which, rejecting the senses and the imagination speaks only to the understanding", he wished to demonstrate that science employed understanding, reason *and* imagination. It used, he said, besides its technical terms a language which "decyphers God's universal laws" <sup>3</sup> In accord with the Lake Poet, Sedgwick believed that "all nature is but the manifestation of a supreme intelligence, and to no being but

him to whom is given the faculty of reason, can this truth be known " He attacked the Utilitarian theory of morals, not only because he thought it "founded on false reasoning," but because he believed that "it produces a degrading effect on the temper and conduct of those who adopt it " Thus he pleaded for the substitution of Bishop Butler's *Sermons* as moral texts, instead of the works of Locke and Paley

Sedgwick boldly attacked Locke's theory of knowledge and Paley's whole rational morality He revived arguments for the reestablishment of a "moral sense " He believed Locke inconsistent in his theory of the senses "It may be," he said, "that we have no innate knowledge, but we have innate intellectual powers, and that they are essentially the same in all men, differing only in degree, is evident from the individual habits, the social sympathies, the civil institutions, and the languages of our race, the common feelings that hurry us into action, the common proofs that gain our deliberate assent " The distinction between "innate ideas and innate capacities" he felt to be profound, it was necessary to an understanding of natural morality. Yet this distinction, he observed, was "almost overlooked in the work of Locke," and gravely slighted by the rational casuistry of Paley. The very fact that the child had no innate ideas increased the moral responsibility of its mentor, for the innate capacities of the child had to be developed <sup>4</sup>

These sermons of Sedgwick are in themselves unimportant, but they represent one of the first extended attacks upon Utilitarian theories by an eminent scientist They present with charming simplicity the propositions of the new Natural Theology and the principal arguments against the rational calculations of utility—arguments soon to be employed by Carlyle and Ruskin Between 1832 and 1859 anti-Utilitarian arguments such as Sedg-



wick's resulted in the spreading of a confused but popular morality. It was derived from the revived seventeenth century "Naturalism" of Bishop Butler, from the unpopular but influential doctrines of Rousseau, from German idealism only half comprehended, later, it was even more confused by the Pauline Platonism of such broad churchmen as Jowett and Caird. So far as I can discover the explicit motive of the earlier academic moralists was to stamp out "utility" as a moral doctrine, but they were soon confronted by a far more difficult enterprise. Progress in the sciences of geology, mineralogy and biology became so astounding that the naturalists themselves found more than they had bargained for in reconciling their conventional religious creeds with their own new generalizations.

For the present, however, it is the influence of this "naturalist" theology on Ruskin that is our concern. Sedgwick, in 1832, failed to gain his ends, but five years later William Whewell<sup>5</sup> continued the attack on "utility" and succeeded in replacing Locke and Paley in the Cambridge curriculum with the *Sermons* of Bishop Butler.

Whewell continued Sedgwick's arguments but gave them sharper definition. In his *Four Sermons*, he invokes texts from Paul and Plato, emphasizes "the law written in the heart" and points out that though the moral faculty originally exists it needs to be cultivated "by exercise and patient contemplation."<sup>6</sup> How much he was influenced by Kantian theories of practical reason is a question, he knew German and some German philosophy, and his particular contribution to moral theory is his conviction that we must rely upon a belief in "a righteousness better than our own", that through our moral faculty or our "reason" we must, imperatively, recognize the moral government of a "righteous God . . . by rewards and punishments."<sup>7</sup> Such a doctrine might just as well have

been derived from Butler or Richard Hooker as from Kant's Categorical Imperative, for Whewell's phraseology is traditionally English. His dull but comprehensive *Elements of Morality* contains chapters on "Immutable Morality" as well as "Polity" that are mere Toryism, it has more than enough to say about the compelling nature of the conscience and moral sense. The laws of action are described as "commands" and are distinct from the laws of nature which are merely "asseitions", but the internal moral law is made harmonious with natural law and with the "Supreme Law" through "Reason," which, as distinct from "Understanding," apprehends the high design of righteousness.<sup>8</sup> All this is the very contradiction of Paley<sup>9</sup> and the moral philosophy taught in Cambridge scarcely ten years before.

It is Whewell's use of the term law that illuminates the new moral attitude which Ruskin and other prominent men inherited. The revival of the "moral faculty" after Locke's demolition of innate ideas is significant, to be sure, but even more important is the moral interpretation of natural facts. The casuistry of these early nineteenth century scientists accomplished the amazing feat of expanding the term nature to fit the rapidly growing scientific knowledge, while they kept unchanged its theological and ethical contours. For a great many souls the discovery of new facts simply enlarged the "Nature" derived from the theology of Bishop Butler in the eighteenth century and extended contours of the "Law" conceived by Hooker, in the sixteenth.

Now Butler, whose collected works were published in 1804 and who was reedited by an Oxford divine in 1844, had assumed "an intelligent author of nature, and natural governor of the world." His intent was to expose the "analogy or likeness between that system of things and dispensation of Providence, which Experience together

with Reason informs us of—in the known course of Nature—” and that system which we apprehend through “revealed Religion” or scriptural record<sup>10</sup> His assumption of the existence of God rests upon the regular eighteenth century argument from “design and final causes,” but his concern is for God’s “natural government of creatures endued with sense and reason ”

The religious concern for nature, however, when revived in the thirties, took on the detail of animal, mineral and vegetable with a vengeance, it described them with “scientific” exactitude The revival was by no means limited to Oxford and Cambridge The religious tradition in lectures had been made secure by John Bampton, who in 1751, the year before the death of Bishop Butler, had left a legacy for Divinity lectures<sup>11</sup> These were still being continued in Ruskin’s day. In 1825 Francis Egerton, the eighth Earl of Bridgewater, made the pious and progressive gesture of leaving £8000 “for the best work on the Goodness of God as manifested in the Creation.” The disposal of the money by the Royal Society to eight capable authors ensured the public of eight treatises, published between 1834 and 1836, proving the power, wisdom and goodness of God in the relations of nature to man, in astronomy and physics, in the human hand, in animal and vegetable physiology and even in digestion! <sup>12</sup>

The new scientist thus philosophized about the external world in terms of natural morals or theology He threw his newly classified detail into the shadow of half mystical Christian elevation, the poetry of the “picturesque” entered his vision and God’s plan became manifest to him as illustrative of general law and the particular functions or ways of life Thus his very classification of species had to conform to some reconciliation of circumstantial facts with what Bishop Butler had called “capacities, temper and qualifications.” These, in “creatures endued with

reason," had always been considered moral. Now, by implication, morality was forced into the behavior of the crawling fauna of land and sea; a huge pathetic or moralistic fallacy was drawn into the very assumptions on which the naturalist proceeded.

This may partly explain the popular misunderstanding and contempt for Rousseau, whose natural morality and natural theology are closer to the age of Hobbes than to the third and fourth decades of the English nineteenth century, for they are based upon a concept of nature in its rational rather than its cosmological or poetic application.<sup>13</sup> Rousseau, indeed, stood in a curious relation to the romantic English naturalists. He had as little use as they for a utilitarian theory based upon "*l'amour de soi*." Nevertheless, he professed an intellectualism, especially in political theory, which had been shared by utilitarians rather than theological naturalists. The latter could not logically follow an intellectualist tradition. But Rousseau's possible influence on the naturalists lay in his conception of the basis of duty which he held to exist in man's own nature. Other than this the majority of his opinions led away from them: he gave reason an important role in morality, he perceived a conflict between the natural instincts of "*l'amour de soi*" and "*pitié*" (which he only half reconciled); he did not seek manifestations of moral law in tree twigs, rocks and oysters. Ruskin, however, never felt the antipathy—even the doubt—about the works of Rousseau which the more respectable of his period professed. He was "surprised," he says, upon reading the *Nouvelle Heloise* in 1849, to find that it gave him pleasure, especially "considering the way it is abused." He continued to admire its author for twenty years, and before the end of that time he was comparing himself intimately to Rousseau.<sup>14</sup>

To all these general tendencies, then, the young John

Ruskin was susceptible, but he seems to have followed the doctrines of no one author. No references to the specific ideas of Rousseau appear in the first two volumes of *Modern Painters*, and the allusions to Sedgwick and Whewell are sparse and of personal rather than theoretical nature. They indicate the reading of scientific and architectural rather than moral works. Ruskin may, nevertheless, have read the sermons of the latter divines, for Sedgwick, along with other distinguished scientists, was friendly to him at the meeting of the British Association in 1847,<sup>15</sup> where Ruskin acted as secretary for the geological section from Oxford. In 1851, after the publication of his own *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, he visited the master of Trinity at Cambridge and was much excited by Whewell's opinions of architecture.<sup>16</sup> Certainly, during Ruskin's residence "Natural Religion" was being discussed at Oxford. Newman had preached on the subject in 1830, and, in spite of reference to Locke, Oxford had used Butler's *Sermons* along with Aristotle in moral philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

The strongest influence upon Ruskin at Oxford was probably that of his own don. The Rev. William Buckland, for whom he read in geology, was both a churchman and a scientist. It would have been very natural for him to lead Ruskin to his own writings and to those of the men with whom he was associated. He was of their mind and upheld publicly the Mosaic account of the flood.<sup>18</sup> Thus it is more than probable that Ruskin's theology matured side by side with his geology, mineralogy and his reading of Wordsworth's poems. Whether or not he read Sedgwick's and Whewell's sermons, he was at Oxford, there, he became firmly rooted in the tradition of Christianized Aristotle, Bishop Butler and the naturalist revival.

His scientific affiliations partly explain Ruskin's indif-

ference to the tractarians, particularly his immunity to the magic of Newman's oratory. Neither his mother nor Buckland,<sup>19</sup> whom he grew to love, was sympathetic with the Oxford Movement. Newman himself differed radically on certain issues in natural religion.<sup>20</sup> More significant still is Newman's lucid exposition of the muddle over conscience or the moral sense, which might have brought much light to Ruskin had he attended it carefully. "Conscience," Newman perceived, "implies a relation between the soul . . . and something superior to itself . . . a tribunal over which it has no power." As "an inward law" conscience could thus bring "no proof of its truth", it could "command" obedience only "in the nature of faith." This, however, Ruskin never could believe. Newman held that conscience was a religious rather than a moral law. In a paragraph which is devastating to the doctrines of Sedgwick, Whewell, Carlyle, Ruskin and many others, he explains that "While conscience is thus ever the sanction of Natural Religion, it is, *when improved*, the rule of morals also. But here is the difference: it is, as such, essentially religious, but *in morals it is necessarily a guide* only in proportion as it *happens to be refined and strengthened in individuals*." <sup>21</sup> For the naturalists, on the contrary, and for naturalist prophets such as Carlyle and Ruskin, conscience was above all *the* necessary guide in morals.

Thus Ruskin derived little or nothing from Newman, but through Buckland, or possibly Sedgwick, was turned back to the much more authoritative Richard Hooker, whose *Ecclesiastical Polity* he read sedulously when writing the second volume of *Modern Painters*. It is Hooker's conception of moral law which inspires him, certainly it is not Newman's.<sup>22</sup> Nature, as in Butler, refers particularly to human nature. Man is thought of ideally as "in perfection of nature" when most perfectly following these

laws. Through man's conscience as well as through natural rewards and punishments the soul is cognizant of God's moral government. So it is that there is a law of human morality and "a law for the rain" too. The boom of Hooker's phrases gave Ruskin his pompous thunder, as he himself admits, but more than tone remained to inspire the dicta throughout his writings on the morality of art.

It may also have been Buckland who led Ruskin to the *Systema Naturae* of Carl von Linné, the Swede, though his references to this monumental eighteenth century work are of later date than those to Hooker. Along with the *Laws* of Plato it seems to have stimulated his continued antipathy to utilitarian conceptions of liberty, law and license. His enthusiasm for it grew with the years: he not only urges Norton to read it,<sup>23</sup> but cites it as the source of "the eternally right and sound" use of the term economy. In his 1883 preface to the second volume of *Modern Painters* he quotes a particularly theological passage:

The preface of the *Systema* bears witness to the splendid faith in which the early naturalist worked. "Man looks with grateful reverence upon those vast families of created beings, which it has pleased the Author of all things to place subordinate to his wisdom and power, he examines with wonder, their formation, habits, and economy," "There is also an attack upon a materialistic theory of life which Ruskin felt the Utilitarians consistently held."<sup>24</sup> Further, in explanation of the rage for exact classification and description, which so affects Ruskin's theories of truth and beauty, Linné's *Preface* continues: "man, the last and best of created works, is by his wisdom alone able to form just conclusions from such things as present themselves to his senses, which can only consist of bodies natural. Hence the first step

of wisdom is to know these bodies, and be able, by those marks imprinted on them by nature to distinguish them from each other, and to affix to every object its proper name These are the elements of science, this the great alphabet of nature, for if the name be lost, the knowledge of the object is lost also, and without these, the student will seek in vain for the means to investigate the hidden treasures of nature " No wonder Ruskin found in this book the confirmation of his own enthusiasm He turned to Linné as to authority, the *Systema* was another and important item in the powerful tradition of natural theology <sup>25</sup>

But it is impossible to sketch in a short space the range and emphasis of this half-scientific, half-theological enthusiasm characteristic of the third and fourth decades of the century, for it continued to affront the Utilitarians on the one hand and the new discoveries of Lyell and Darwin on the other Its expressions were extremely varied, but its temper is most perfectly described in Edmund Gosse's beautiful record of his own father, *Father and Son* The emphasis upon doctrinal points, upon conscience, upon scriptural inspiration, varied with the reading of individuals Sometimes they touched the writings of earlier divines, sometimes, as with Coleridge or Carlyle, they turned from Wordsworth's sentimental naturalism to the transcendentalism of the German philosophers, or perhaps, inspired by the philosophy of Sir William Hamilton, put God and moral law completely out of reach of man's intelligence as did the brilliant author of one of the *Bampton Lectures*, Henry Longueville Mansell.<sup>26</sup>

It is a curious mixture, this naturalism, that contributed also to the scientific optimism of the mid-century Its devotees were as apt to perceive moral progress as the will of the devil in the evolutionary geology of



Lyell or the biological "survival of the fittest" Only some such alternative could have motivated Huxley's intrepid, pessimistic and polemic agnosticism Ruskin and many other naturalists became like Buckland and Sedgwick, as concerned with the spiritual meaning of the external world as with the structure of vegetables, rocks and animals It would be an unhistorical definition of Victorian naturalism that did not take account of the important theological as well as poetic elements which characterized its scope and motivated its professors

Thus, even before Carlyle had misinterpreted Goethe's *Entsagen* to mean renunciation and long before Ruskin had read the *Everlasting Yea*, a generation had been prepared with anti-utilitarian views It carried the greatest confusion of notions about static and evolutionary nature, about conscience and natural moral sentiment, about science itself Neither Carlyle's ejaculations nor Ruskin's temperamental oratory were to fall on ears untuned Sons of the important bourgeoisie had penetrated university circles where it had already become intellectually respectable to frown on Paley and Locke, to court vague doctrines of innate moral capacity and to confound Aristotelian and seventeenth century notions of temperance

Science particularly was performing the romantic function of the earlier poets, it was literally demonstrating heaven in wildflowers Goose, in *Father and Son*, recalls teachers "who held that God had scattered fossils about the world as a test of faith", and the Reverend Whewell maintained in his *Christian Ethics* that "the typical vertebra . . . was multiplied all over the world as a proof of the Crucifixion" It was evidently not unusual for anatomists to be asked if they had found the whale that swallowed Jonah, or for lecturers as late as 1859 to adhere to the accuracy of the chronology of Genesis "In 1864 eleven thousand clergy signed a dec-

laration on inspiration and eternal punishment" the effect of which was "that all questions of physical science should be referred to the written words of Holy Scripture" <sup>27</sup>

The moral notions of John Ruskin, which now so often seem preposterous, were then reasonable to many. The ideas recorded in the following pages must therefore be accepted as part of a common background with the confused but equally monstrous opinions of bright and sincerely spiritual minds. In spite of utilitarian economy, prosperity and free trade there were many Victorians <sup>28</sup> between 1830 and 1850 who had read little Locke and less Bentham, who had escaped the teachings of James and John Stuart Mill and who preferred above other things to call themselves naturalists, sure in their hearts that they were Christian gentlemen.

#### RUSKIN'S DEITY

From the time of the publication of the second volume of *Modern Painters* in 1846 to his last writing in 1889, the general outline of Ruskin's moral philosophy suffered little change. It is therefore not difficult to state in brief form. It is a combination of Aristotelian and Hebraic ethics resting upon a more or less "naturalistic" theism. But in the application of esthetic concepts to economics there is both complexity and perversity. Ruskin's impetuosity, his predilection for the grand flourish of the prophet, his gradual disillusionment in the Calvinistic theology of his adolescence, his shift in sympathy from a Wordsworthian "naturalism" to a Carlylian "humanitarianism" . . . all make his moral theory exceedingly difficult to encompass in detail, and at times to comprehend. To understand the variety of his opinions one must discover first the principal and unchanging tenets of his

morality and second, their relation to what is ordinarily called religion, for both moral and religious concepts qualify his excursions into art and economics

As a young man entering upon his first essay in art criticism, and as an old man finishing the last pages of *Praeterita*, Ruskin believed that the moral sense was universal and instinctive. In 1883, troubled by what he felt was the growth of materialistic beliefs and by misinterpretation of his own writings, he reedited the second volume of *Modern Painters* with a new preface. In this he outlined his ideal of "Righteousness and Faith" as beginning "in truthful knowledge of human power and human worth" and ending "in the revelation of a personal and governing Deity"

In 1846 the Deity came much closer the beginning than the end of experience, for between these dates Ruskin had gone through two or even three phases of belief. His ideal, however, remained constant, a moral law which he believed universal "common to the Jew and Arab,—to the Greek and Christian,—the past world, the present world, and the world to come,—is assumed here, and in all my other writings whatever, as the *basis* of religion itself . . ." <sup>29</sup> This notion had grown out of a belief in Christian conscience which was developed to alarming proportions by his early maturity. He had always universalized conscience and was soon carrying it into artistic and social doctrine. In 1880 he could dogmatize with even greater assurance than in 1846. "All human creatures, in all ages and places of the world, who have had warm affections, common sense and self-command, have been, and are, Naturally Moral. Human nature in its fulness is necessarily Moral,—without Love, it is inhuman,—without sense, inhuman,—without discipline, inhuman" <sup>30</sup>

Always fortified by texts from the Bible, Ruskin's faith

in "Moral Law," and that almost concrete thing the "Moral Faculty," was sustained by the current naturalism of the period and amplified from Aristotle, from Carlyle and from Plato. I have already alluded to the fact that Ruskin's division of esthetics into "aesthetics" (sensation) and "theoria" (contemplation) corresponds superficially to Aristotle's division of the soul. Carlyle's "The Moral Sense, thank God, is a thing you never will account for," finds again and again parallels throughout Ruskin's works. The volumes from 1848 onward are scattered with quotations from Plato's *Laws*, *The Republic* (Book III) and many of the shorter dialogues.<sup>31</sup>

Ruskin believes passionately that all wise men in all ages have known that "Justice and Mercy are fastened in the hearts of men"; that "The arts, and the morality of men, are founded on the same primal order",<sup>32</sup> that this order is expressed "in entirely consistent terms throughout the higher—(and even the inferior, when undefiled)—forms of all lovely literature and art."<sup>33</sup> All who incline their hearts, he said, may see "that through all the mysteries of human fate and history, this one great law of fate is written on the walls of cities or in their dust, written in letters of light, and letters of blood,—that when truth, temperance, and equity have been preserved, all strength, and peace, and joy have been preserved also,—that where lying, lasciviousness, and covetousness have been practiced, there has followed an infallible, and, for centuries, irrecoverable ruin."<sup>34</sup>

Now there is no part of Ruskin's theory which has been more consistently misunderstood by the popular criticism of the twentieth century than his views on the relation of this moral law to religion. The reason is obvious if the question is considered carefully. His religious faith so often changes its form and its emphasis that it

is difficult to say in general what it was. Ruskin himself pointed to the fact that all popular religion is founded on the hope of a better life to come and that it is through this hope that popular religion reaches for a popular morality. But was his own religion popular? Did the morality he professed rely upon hope of heaven and fear of hell? Or did he conceive of a very different God from the austere Lord of Wrath, a benevolent and less personal deity, the creative life force of the world? Such questions are significant, for the moral notions which arise from these concepts of deity are, in implication, so different as to become contradictory. Which concept, then, did Ruskin hold? Which moral path did he follow?

All through his life Ruskin held a general belief in the existence of a "Ruling and Judging Spiritual Power." Early in his career this deity was very close to the seventeenth century puritan God, the God of Isaiah, later, by 1858, such a concept had given way to a less theological but more adaptable humanitarian theism. Emphasis throughout his works shifts increasingly away from Calvinism and even theology as such to the moral rather than the supernatural elements in faith. Even in 1883, ten years after a mystical reaction had set in, when he even regarded spiritualism with seriousness, his new "Preface" to *Modern Painters* II concerns practical and moral issues rather than theological. Yet always behind moral law there is a deity, "manifest to those who desire its manifestation, and concealed from those who desire its concealment." The changes in the nature of the deity, however, are not a little astonishing.

In 1846 the presence of a watchful God hovers over the print of the second volume of *Modern Painters*. It threatens the reader in the gratuitous quotations from Richard Hooker and the verses from the Bible. Morality at this time is distinctly religious and puritanical,

though there is no great emphasis upon fear Praise and awe, however, have actually been carried into the esthetic system. But by 1862 a profound change has occurred Ruskin writes to his father from Paris. "All your extracts from Robertson are admirable, and so far from its being difficult or strange for a man to hold his morality when he has lost what is called in modern language religion, I believe that all true nobleness and worthiness only comes out when people cease to think of another world. The relations of God to us have been entirely broken and obscured by human lies, it is impossible at present to recover or ascertain them, on *our* side, and we must walk in darkness, till better days come"

In 1860, however, the influence of Carlyle and a great deal more experience with humanity had turned his interest from nature to man,<sup>35</sup> along with the breakdown of his earlier theology one discovers the transformation of the naturalist's mysticism into that of an impulsive humanitarian He knows, like the Savoyard Vicar, less and less about God, more and more about human duty, and it is at this period (1862) that he reveals to his father his fancied resemblance to the mind of Rousseau<sup>36</sup> God almost disappears, at least in the sense of an immediately perceptible presence. In the last volume of *Modern Painters* (1860) Ruskin declares in his most Carlylean tone that neither God can be manifest nor nature revealed except through first knowing the human spirit—the man himself Both the letter to his father, given above, and such reflections as the following are typical of the years from 1860 to 1870: " 'But this poor miserable Me! Is *this*, then, all the book I have got to read about God in?' Yes, truly so. No other book, nor fragment of book, than that, will you ever find, no velvet-bound missal, nor frankincensed manuscript; . . . That flesh-bound volume is the only revelation that is,

that was, or that can be. In that is the image of God painted, in that is the law of God written, in that is the promise of God revealed Know thyself, for through thyself only thou canst know God " <sup>37</sup>

Ruskin had wandered far from the transcendentalism of Wordsworth, even from the simple natural religion of Butler and his own friend Sedgwick, he was now realizing the "Everlasting Yea" of *Sartor Resartus*, his command "Know Thyself" is the first step, he now believes, to any "true religion" whatever Thus the concept of the awful father had given way to that of divine benevolence, immanent in man, and to be discovered through man's soul So too had come the clarification of a relation between religion and morals He had set aside the religion of fear and tried to rid his morality of negative, ascetic and supernatural notions <sup>38</sup> In fact by 1870 his convictions have grown not only courageous, but (for a man with his theological inheritance) progressively anti-religious "There are many religions," he says in his Oxford Lecture, "but there is only one morality There are moral and immoral religions, which differ as much in precept as in emotion, but there is only one morality, which has been, is and must be for ever, as instinct in the hearts of all civilized men, as certain and unalterable as their outward bodily form, and which receives from religions neither law, nor place, but only hope and felicity " For four years more, up to the time of his nervous illness and his visit to Assisi, religion held for him definitely a secondary place in all social and esthetic theory

One may say that although Ruskin believed in the existence of a spiritual power his conception of the nature of this deity was a matter of change But the conviction of the instinctivity, naturalness and universality of a moral sense, "fastened" as he says, "in the hearts

of men," was permanent with him and necessary to all his conclusions on architecture, esthetics, history and economics. With this clearly in mind one may proceed to the complex relations of morality with art, for it is in his theory of beauty that the particular characters of his moral views are explicit.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ROOTS OF BEAUTY

#### THE NECESSITY OF SANCTION

THE range of emotions which Ruskin admitted into "fine art" was limited by moral prejudices. But his use of the term moral had a special significance that no mere description of "proper emotion" or "respectable feelings" can entirely convey. In a profound sense beauty was emotional, and because all emotions were supposed to fall under a moral faculty, beauty was moral. Yet art held many kinds of ideas: like nature, art was a spiritual treasury, it was the greatest human record of virtues. A moment's reflection upon the traditions which formed Ruskin's inheritance will illuminate the fact that in discussing ideas, content and subject matter he was following a conventional road of esthetic speculation.

The popular subjects of art had been religious. Slowly, they had changed to portraiture, to classic themes, to historical allegory and, shortly before Ruskin's time, to natural landscape. Each of these changes brought some new theoretical justification, some eager attempt to make taste reasonable. A sanction had to be given to things that had less sanction than religious subject matter. So the attempted justification of each new province of beauty pushed criticism into religion, religion into morals, morals into esthetics, and esthetics, if the nineteenth century writer were sufficiently sophisticated, into German metaphysics.

But Ruskin more or less reversed the process he changed the order of the propositions, he argued from esthetics back to morals. He believed that art was a noble language and, above all, that landscape was perhaps its most thrilling and certainly its newest type. He began by justifying the esthetic representation of "natural truth." Only by genuine esthetic seeing could the artist "reveal" the facts of God's universe. But true facts in art must necessarily be shown compatible with beauty, so he proceeded to analyze the objects or grounds of beautiful impressions. His explanations, however, had to impress the reader with as great authority as those of the critics before him. It seemed to him, therefore, that each kind of truth or beauty in art had to be given some unusual connection with human behavior, some ultimate value, if possible, to human life. Beauty thus drove him straight to morals.

The revived tenets of "Natural Religion" illuminated the emotional value of landscape; but emotions, sentiments, fancies demanded some certain discriminative principle. With religion gone from the current subject matter, what could serve as a criterion to his own conscience and to that of other educated men—what, but some such absolute as the moral sense? The moralistic revivals in Cambridge and Oxford, had prepared for him this popular sanction, the idea itself was particularly pliable. Ruskin perceived that the moral sense could be stretched to cover the whole content of art. It could apprehend the beauty or the emotional meaning of landscape, of Italian primitives, of Tintoretto, of Gothic architecture, even of certain modern painters! It was a triumphant sanction.

The moral sense offered a genuine and reasonable modern "Righteousness" to the artist and the critic. Ruskin's reasoning was not obscure, if the language of art must

convey something, that something must be of value to life besides being in itself esthetically good, beauty could not be abstract and esoteric it was obviously emotional, it was subject to variation in the range of feelings Art, by the very nature of its content, its potent forms, its human expressiveness, must involve a theory of moral value Considering the traditional subject matter alone, it seemed axiomatic that art could not be separated from human work and festivity, from the serious thoughts and the gay thoughts of people living in a society It was obvious that art reflected the good and the true and was useful thereby

The interpolation of moral value into criticism was neither new nor original It was common to empirical as well as idealistic theories Didactic values had been developed in literary and elementary forms to justify historical painting by the Academicians Alison had found moral and religious arguments to complete his very materialistic theory of association Lauder, in his *Essay on the Origin of Taste*, which accompanied as a philosophical defense his edition of *Price on the Picturesque* (1842), asserted that "it is by means of this constitution of our nature, that the emotions of taste are blended with moral sentiments, and that one of the greatest pleasures of which we are susceptible, is made finally subservient to moral improvement " The roster could be extended, many others at this time besides Ruskin considered "pleasure" "instrumental to the moral purpose of our being " <sup>1</sup>

Ruskin's only originality lay in the order of his propositions and in the enlarged application of the moral argument He reached a moral sanction indirectly, applying the doctrine of sentimental naturalism to art with the immediate intent of eulogizing rather than defending Turner, an immense moral value entered along with the

glory of material facts. The landscape painter, it developed, was "to guide the spectator's mind to objects *worthy* of contemplation," and, as I have said, objects had to fit the taste of cultivated people, conform to certain standards of respectability and be "characteristically" true. By analyzing beauty Ruskin then proceeded to reveal its moral essence. Gradually it was shown that the perception of both characteristic truth and beauty depended upon the sharpness of a disciplined intuition, upon the consistent welfare of the soul, which was, for Ruskin, especially during the period when his religious beliefs fell to pieces, the moral sense.

#### VIRTUES IN BEAUTIFUL DISGUISE

Ruskin's analysis of beauty reveals the full scope of the Victorian moral mania. Believing and explicitly stating that beauty consists of mental impressions, that it is without objective reality in any metaphysical sense, Ruskin objectifies it as all esthetic writers tend to do. He analyzes beauty into types, discusses them as if they existed there in the world before his eyes, in order to discover the secrets of the instinctive and spiritual pleasure which beauty affords. Granting the illusion of its essential objectivity this seemed the only sensible way to discuss beauty, for Ruskin had no intricate psychology to aid him. So in what he calls his "demonstration" of the pleasurable qualities in beautiful things, one finds the naked roots of his moral philosophy, the broad sweep of his humanism and the deformed outlines of the asceticism which he inherited, which tortured his thought and very likely produced the nervous depressions which he endured. Thus it is only by a survey of what appear to be secondary details in his theory of art that one can

comprehend the bizarre confines of the heaven and hell through which his mind wandered

He had observed that all objects might contain material characteristics which suggest immaterial ones, that they might be regarded as types of spiritual essences hence the term "Typical Beauty" his first classification The theoretical inspiration<sup>2</sup> came partly from the third book of Plato's *Republic*, for the way in which beauty is here "typically representative" of moral traits and temper is in general similar to the ancient theory The idea is also derived from the Christian naturalist's view of the world which his friends Buckland and Sedgwick held, this qualifies and changes the theoretical Platonism so as to make it almost unrecognizable More than once moral symbols are confused with religious

A second type of beauty, called "Vital," has to do with the suggestion of spiritual ideas in organic as distinct from the inorganic world; it, too, rises from the moral and sentimental elements in the cult of naturalism "Vital Beauty" consists, however, not in the mere suggestion of immaterial qualities from the formal aspects of line, light, color and shape, but in the "appearance of happiness" and of "moral excellence" in animals and men Both classes of beauty approach identity when the object in question is such that the distinction between organic and inorganic seems difficult to the eye, but this did not embarrass the impetuous theorist for, in spite of superficial inconsistency, he had already defined these beauties as impressionistic His enthusiasm (he was twenty-seven years old when he wrote the second volume of *Modern Painters*) carries him to such extremes of "demonstration" that his words become tacit denials even of the categories of common sense Indeed, they tend to confirm Bishop Butler's belief that the natural constitution of the world is "carried on merely in subserviency" to

the "moral constitution," just "as the vegetable world is for the animal, and organized bodies for minds" <sup>3</sup>

Fortunately, Ruskin warns the reader that he does not insist upon a literal interpretation of the spiritual and moral qualities which he reads into the forms of natural phenomena. He tries himself to proceed with great care <sup>4</sup>

"But I have repeated again and again that the ideas of Beauty are instinctive, and that it is only upon consideration, and even then in doubtful and disputable way, that they appear in their typical character. Neither do I intend at all to insist upon the particular meaning which they appear to myself to bear, but merely on their actual and demonstrable agreeableness. I leave it to the reader to accept or not, as he pleases, that reason of its agreeableness which is the only one that I can at all trace . . ."

Yet despite the need for caution it is imperative for the sake of his theory that Ruskin find some such illustration of "Ideas of Beauty" as that which I shall outline below. There is an obvious demand for evidence in visible form of the emotional ideas that are said to constitute beauty. There is a logical demand for some explanation of how "contemplation" is begun, or at what focal point it is kindled as it transforms mere sensual pleasure into the half-religious "theoretic experience of beauty."

The qualities in the appearance of objects, then, called respectively "Typical" and "Vital Beauty," fulfill these demands, they exist, they are agreeable, they satisfy necessary gaps in the theoretical context. They are the impressions of form which constitute beauty, both moral and spiritual. But they are also justifications in terms of schematic detail. One should not lose sight of the general purpose of Ruskin's study, which was, in the light of the whole essay of *Modern Painters*, "to demonstrate" how

the boundary of natural beauty has been extended by modern art, or, in other words, by Turner

### TYPICAL BEAUTY

The material qualities in things suggest six immaterial ideas. Of these "Infinity," "Repose" and "Moderation" are the simplest and most obvious. "Infinity" Ruskin thinks, is the most typical of the nature of God. It is thus religious rather than moral, but it is apparent in fine art and apprehended by the moral sense. In painting, for example, it arises from the appearance of space or the effect of extended light in a sky. The Dutch painters have little of it, but it is one of the chief factors to exalt the paintings of the Italians, especially the Venetians. It may also, as critics have observed, be suggested by the infinite curvature of line ("a curve divides itself infinitely"). The loveliest objects of nature are rich in curvature: crystals, for example, and water and light. "Infinity," however, is not to be inferred from vastness, but from gradations of light and color in nature and in painting. No hand of an artist can equal nature, yet the beauty of certain Venetian painters, Correggio in particular, lies in this subtle mastery of gradation. The importance of all suggestions of "Infinity" in art is that they stimulate high emotions. "Admiration," "Awe" and the experience of impenetrable subtlety.

The quality of "Repose" is much more difficult to define. Simply stated, it is the "appearance of permanence or quietness." Defined more exactly it appears to be "the rest of things in which there is vitality or capability of motion, actual or imagined." Ruskin points to the fact that there is a tendency to idealize both the vitality and the rest of natural objects when we regard them. "Repose"<sup>5</sup> seems to him to suggest the divine attribute of

staticness, of "I-am-ness", but its moral extensions of calm strength, poise and dignity are clear. No great work of art can be without repose. Ruskin illustrates this quality most perfectly from Wordsworth's poetry, which is full of lines contrasting reposeful and restless things. The Elgin *Theseus* and Michael Angelo's *The Plague of Fiery Serpents* (in a corner of the Sistine) may also illustrate repose as compared with the pernicious and meanly conceived "*Laocoon*" group.<sup>6</sup>

"Moderation," or as Ruskin defines it, "the appearance in material things of a self-restrained liberty" is also necessary to all great art. It is a quality at once moral and religious. It is the type of government by divine law. It is implicit in things rather than imposed from without. In human nature, it is the source of the religious mind's immanent assurance of God. In art, it has no relation to fashion or the then much discussed "finish," but rather to "completeness," which has moral connotations. Moderation is to be found in Michael Angelo's *Pieta of Genoa* and the paintings of Leonardo, Raffaele, Angelico, Pinturicchio, John Bellini "and all other such serious and loving men."<sup>7</sup>

This obvious virtue, "Moderation," was scarcely an original idea with Ruskin. Poets, philosophers and novelists of the first two thirds of the nineteenth century had much to say concerning it. But the notion has many aspects and Ruskin's version is remarkably unpuritanical. "A self-restrained liberty" is much nearer what Goethe meant by *Entsagen* than Carlyle's puritanical misreading, "renunciation", it is implicit in the idealism of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*. But Ruskin had not at this time read Goethe. He might well have taken the suggestion from Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*, though it is doubtful if Wordsworth or Coleridge could have given him his unpolitical idea of liberty, for Ruskin's notion is more di-



rectly ethical and Aristotelian. It is similar to the views on freedom and control in the later poetry of Patmore, and in the work of Francis Thompson and the *Essays* of Mrs. Meynell. In 1846, however, the source for Ruskin's moral "mode of beauty" was probably Plato, abetted by the not too exact memory of the Aristotelian "golden mean." The notion is fortified by passages from the Bible, but when it appears later in *Modern Painters V* (1860), as a principle of artistic composition, it is accompanied by an explicit and strangely flattering allusion to John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty*, which was published while Ruskin was finishing this last volume. Vague as the artistic meaning of "moderation" appears to be, and now quaintly old fashioned, it is no less intangible, hides no more intellectual lacunae than the very popular and very useful contemporary term "restraint" in its mysterious applications to art.

Ruskin's conscious intention in discussing these qualities should be clear. He attempted to combine what we should regard today as esthetic facts with their moral corollaries. "Repose," "Moderation," even the suggestion of "Infinity" are still constantly being observed and discussed as esthetic characteristics of art objects. They are not, of course, left by astute or sophisticated critics without elaborate definition, but the attempts to demoralize them by many and to give them some so-called scientific references to material elements is often more confusing than is Ruskin's candid moral connotation. The esthetic manifestations, call them what you will, seemed to Ruskin to reflect moral character. In his theory, therefore, they are put down as moral; their value is definite, for esthetic qualities were never to be abstracted from the living character of men but related to it. The significance of beauty was fundamentally human.

Certain other qualities of beautiful things are more

complex in their esthetic relationships; their moral import is consequently more profound. "Symmetry," "Unity," "Purity," may appear to greater or less degree in nature and in objects of fine art; their roots lie deep in the instinctive and hence moral character of human beings.

"Symmetry," Ruskin thinks, is both universally felt and understood. Unlike "Repose" it is not difficult to define. "In all perfectly beautiful objects," he says, "there is to be found the opposition of one part to another, and a reciprocal balance." But this opposition and balance must be quite clearly distinguished from "Proportion." The difference is subtle but important "Proportion" is the connection of unequal qualities with one another; "Symmetry" is the opposition of equal qualities

While serviceable in superficial criticism, this distinction will not hold in all cases. When, for instance, might a "connection" become a balance? And may there not be "opposition" of unequal quantities in such a form as to produce a relatively equal balance? These questions do not, however, occur to Ruskin, for the quality interested him only as a possible suggestion for the remote notion of abstract justice. "Symmetry," he observed, "is rather a mode of arrangement of qualities, than a quality itself." In art, symmetry is sometimes compatible with ugliness as in many Elizabethan ornaments, but it is more often seen "in works of grandeur" as in the landscapes of Tintoret and Titian.

The idea of "Unity," however, is esthetically and socially of far greater importance.<sup>8</sup> It will be well to follow Ruskin closely. "Unity," he says, is affirmed in nature, in animals, in man and in art. The idea is "typical of that Unity which we attribute to God . . . that Unity which consists not in His own singleness or separation, but in the necessity of His inherence in all things that be, with-

out which no creature of any kind could hold existence for a moment." Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs* are quoted to lend their tremendous authority to the idea that "The unity of matter is, in its noblest form, the organization of it which builds it up into temples for the spirit." The aphorism is original but the thought is common to the creeds of enthusiastic naturalists. It is a salient thesis with Bishop Butler in his *Essay on Natural and Revealed Religion*. It is the principal theme of Emerson's *Nature*, as it is of all Wordsworth's nature poetry.

In the esthetic application of the idea of unity, however, Ruskin launches into an extended classification of its different manifestations. There are several sorts of unity: there is a "Unity of different things, subjected to one and the same influence." This is called "Subjectional Unity." Clouds or waves blown by the wind, or crowds of people inspired by the same ideal, are illustrations. A second kind, called "Unity of Origin," is the unity "of things arising from one spring and source . . . of the branches of trees, and of the petals and starry rays of flowers, and of the beams of light." "Unity of Sequence," however, is that which consists "of things that form links in chains, and steps in ascents, stages in journeys, . . . the melody of sounds, the continuity of lines. . . ." These three types are fairly obvious, and though they contain a suggestion of social and ethical principles are important mainly because they serve to isolate the fourth type, "Essential Unity" or the "Unity of Membership," "which is the great Unity of which other unities are but parts and means; it is in matter the harmony of sounds and consistency of bodies, and among spiritual creatures their happiness and very life in God."

"Unity of Membership," a pantheistic and naturalistic concept, is central to Ruskin's esthetic as well as his

social theories. In Ruskin's explanation the ideas of variety and proportion are necessarily involved in this unity, ideas which are really relationships of quantity in art and in society. They are therefore manifest in the form of pictures and the institutions of society.

"Unity of Membership" is paramount in all great art and all societies which produce great art; but it does not imply artistic or social equalities. It is the sort of unity which cannot exist "between things similar to each other; for two or more equal and like things cannot be members of one another, nor can they form one, or a whole thing . . . unless they are united by a third, different from both." But given these like members with the third different, essential unity is established by "a difference and opposition of direction in the setting on of the like members."

Such is the principle. It is clear, therefore, that variety in the relationships of the members is necessary, but Ruskin warns against giving any undue importance to variety itself. Perhaps he is thinking of Hogarth and the eighteenth century formalists when he declares that it is a grave mistake to "insist on the inherent agreeableness of variety." Perhaps he is foreseeing the possible social implications attendant upon any doctrine that could draw happiness or social good from the concept of change or multiplicity. At any rate, and clearly for the esthetic discussion at hand, he postulates variety as essential only in this secondary sense, only in so far as it contributes to the unity of membership. Neither novelty nor familiarity, Ruskin often said, could be a cause of beauty, for the love of novelty seemed to him evil. That he had learned at the university from his Aristotelian *Ethics*. Now, however, he points further to the fact that variety, in this secondary sense,<sup>9</sup> is necessary also to the "Unity of Subjection" and of "Sequence"; he illustrates from

nature, from Italian art and from music, especially from Mozart.

The presence of variety within unity involves the formal idea of proportion; it is the very relationship upon which unity depends, especially in the unity of membership. But the nature of proportion varies slightly in two ways. The obvious type, the mere "relation of quantities" which is visible or "sensible," Ruskin calls "Apparent Proportion." This, he found, might "consist with all types of unity" and lies at the root of most of our impressions of the beautiful. In its simplest form it can be illustrated by the elementary ratio *A* is to *B* as *B* is to *C*. But it is vain, he observes, to try to reduce this proportion as it appears in art or in nature to finite rules, for it is as various as musical melody, and the laws to which it is subject are of the same general kind, so that the determination of right and wrong proportion is as much a matter of feeling and experience as the appreciation of good musical composition. "Apparent Proportion" is thus sensual or instinctive; its appreciation involves no rational ideas. there is "no sense of rightness or wrongness connected with Apparent Proportion, no sense of utility, propriety, or expediency." Because of its intrinsic capacity for affording pleasure, therefore, and because of its importance in formal unity, this functionless proportion is a source of beauty.

Though "Apparent Proportion" involves no ideas of utility, propriety or expediency, it cannot be denied that there is a proportion in many objects of esthetic character which refers to some function "to be performed by them." Ruskin, as many theorists before him, observed that there was often an adaptation of quantities to some purpose, function or exigency. He distinguished, therefore, a second type of proportion which he called "Constructive" and emphasized the fact that it differed

from the former type by the intellectual nature of the pleasure afforded. Often "highly agreeable to the eye" it nevertheless involved intellectual judgment and could not in the same sense as "Apparent Proportion" be a source of beauty. Ruskin perceived that certain theorists had confused the two, for example, Burke and Hogarth. The latter made the functional type of proportion a source of beauty; the former, because he saw that beauty was instinctive and that function involved intellect, denied all connection between proportion and beauty.

Ruskin takes some pains to point out Burke's mistake: Burke should not, of course, have failed to see the esthetic value in "Apparent Proportion," nor should he have failed to observe that even "Constructive Proportion" in its often beautiful adaption of quantities to the demands of utility furnished an attendant pleasure. But Burke was not alone in error. "all writers on esthetics,"<sup>10</sup> Ruskin thinks, have failed to perceive this distinction between the pleasure "to the mind," arising from ideas of rightness, wrongness, utility, etc., and the instinctive pleasure in perceiving a simple formal relation or ratio of unified parts. They have either denied, as Burke, the importance of proportion altogether, or they have gone to the other extreme, as Hogarth did, and attributed beauty to the appearance of the functional arrangement itself. They have missed the central distinction in formal qualities of beauty.

But the distinction was of far greater significance to Ruskin than to many others. Even at this time he must have perceived the bearing which his view of proportion might have on architectural criticism, though he could scarcely have realized its further analogies in the social theories he was to conceive. Yet his critical preference in architecture was already cast, for to separate an "apparent" proportion from a "functional" in the field of

painting led inevitably to a similar discrimination in architecture; and the emphasis upon the analytic rather than the constructive proportion dictated Ruskin's bias toward decorative rather than constructional principles. It led also to an emphasis in social theory upon intrinsic rather than extrinsic notions of utility. These speculations were greatly extended in Ruskin's architectural<sup>11</sup> and social criticism. But in 1844 and 45, when Ruskin was analyzing beauty, the distinction between two kinds of proportion was of immediate consequence because the moral implications behind these technical terms are profound. They are not, however, difficult to expose.

In distinguishing functionless from functional proportion, Ruskin is isolating what one might call a pure esthetic element, the relationship of parts in a unity which has no connection with utility. It is obvious that such a relationship could suggest moral ideas only in a "typical" or symbolic sense. Ruskin believed that the experience of beauty was moral in the general sense that it was instinctive, of the soul and under the moral faculty, he denied isolated esthetic elements in experience. Thus, he used his Greek term "Theoria" (contemplation) and his elaborate naturalistic theory of beauty to bring this esthetic element within bounds. In this way he avoided separating beauty from moral feeling.

But his theoretical argument was further complicated by the fact that he was very near a materialistic theory of beauty and the evils of utilitarianism. He had been forced to push the distinction of "apparent" and "functional" into proportion because he was otherwise in a quandary. If he had admitted that constructive proportion, a unity depending upon function, to have direct significance in producing beauty, then the necessary demands of existence could be said to produce beauty. This would have given beauty a utilitarian basis. If the pro-

portion of an animal's body were beautiful, and that proportion were none other than the relationship of members necessary to the fulfillment of the animal's material needs, or the demands of its existence—then, alas, where would the spiritual significance of beauty be discovered?

He would have had to admit along with Alison and Lauder (with whose theory of association he violently disagreed) "that the beauty of proportion is to be ascribed . . . from certain proportions being expressive of the fitness of the parts to the end designed", that "design," as Lauder says, and "fitness and utility may be considered as the three great causes of the relative beauty of forms" <sup>12</sup> In fact he would have had to admit that beauty itself is relative, rational or material. How then would he have reached a supernatural sanction for art?

Ruskin's way out of the tangle was satisfactory to him but scarcely tolerable to a student of modern esthetics. He avoided functional proportion by regarding it as intellectual and thus indirectly contributive to beauty <sup>13</sup> This cleared away the danger of utilitarianism. "Apparent Proportion" he put down as a quality of beauty, but limited its absolute esthetic character by placing it under "Typical Beauty" where as a part of "Unity of Membership" it must be seen to suggest the elaborate relationship of moral elements in the soul—a type of the perfect moral state, the right condition of the heart, where all impulses contribute in their variety to the unity which is the instinctive control in great natures. In a more far-reaching sense, it is typical of Divine Unity—perhaps the ever mysterious "proportion" in the Trinity.

His escape from dilemma is simply another instance of his reliance upon common naturalistic doctrine. His friend Sedgwick might easily have suggested to him a similar escape from utilitarian theories. In one of his *Cambridge Sermons* he writes: "If the beautiful struc-



ture of organic bodies prove design, still more impressive is the proof, when we mark the adaptation of their organs to the condition of the material world. By this adaptation, we link together all nature, animate and inanimate, and prove it to be one harmonious whole, produced by one dominant intelligence" <sup>14</sup> This was also the general argument in Buckland's *Bridgewater Treatise* on geology and mineralogy as exhibiting "The Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God." It was furthermore the implicit theme in the argument of John Kidd (*2nd Bridgewater Treatise*) "On the adaptation of nature to the physical condition of man." In this way the conventional naturalist escaped the utilitarian argument which explained forms in terms of their obvious, existential and material circumstances <sup>15</sup> Behind mere utility there always lay "The Great Design," beneficent and, as Ruskin proved, beautiful.

#### FROM MORAL SYMBOLS TO SOCIAL VALUES

Of the five qualities of beauty considered, "Infinity" and "Repose" are the most directly suggestive of divine attributes; "Symmetry," "Moderation" and "Unity" the most rich in moral associations. Had his analysis been made ten years later Ruskin would probably have minimized the supernatural suggestions and enlarged the humanitarian extensions of moderation and unity. In 1846, however, he had not lost his puritan theology and he was still particularly concerned with the natural beauty of landscape. It is interesting in view of these facts that his last and most significant quality of beauty should possess for him the most powerful supernatural suggestions when he refers it specifically to the physical condition of matter. In spite of the paradox, his explanation is more logical than those preceding; the importance of this sixth quality, "Purity," to his later ethical views is profound.

Through an Aristotelian or Platonic source Ruskin associates the term purity with *energia*. Purity is not fundamentally to be considered a moral or spiritual term, the original reference, Ruskin believes, is altogether material. Purity is a quality of light, a type of energy. Though light is not to be classed with other obvious "conditions or modes of being" because it is "a substance or motion" and is "evidently necessary to the perception of all," it is still material. No one could separate the agreeableness of light, "in its own nature, from the sense of its necessity and value for the purposes of life." Thus energy of all things is necessary and valuable for the purposes of life and purity is dependent upon energy.

In taking this position Ruskin resolved the dire separation of matter and spirit characteristic of idealistic theories of beauty up to his time. Nature, according to the naturalist's argument, was pure in its very being. But this purity seemed to Ruskin at once a materialistic quality and a type of spiritual energy, since the divine will was expressed in the universe. His identification of purity with material energy gave Ruskin, as Bosanquet points out, a tremendous theoretical advantage over speculations precedent to his own<sup>16</sup> which separated earthly from heavenly beauty or material from moral. But in this very contention Ruskin was precariously near theoretical ruin. He had again managed to get himself into a definite utilitarian position: light, and hence purity, in spite of its Platonic connotation, he admitted to be necessary for the purposes of life, the possible implication being that its goodness arose from this universal and necessary utility. Such an admission would have made the "typical" suggestion of spiritual purity gratuitous; beauty, in such an argument, would arise from the very character of life itself in its most material sense. The universal purity of nature argued for a materialistic morality. Yet Ruskin

failed to see where he logically stood: his theoretical blindness is strikingly ironical as the argument proceeds

Impurity, he says, refers to "conditions of matter in which its various elements are placed in a relation incapable of healthy or proper operation; and most distinctly to conditions in which the negation of vital or energetic action is most evident, as in corruption or decay of all kinds . . ." Thus, because purity is not merely an abstract quality, but precisely characteristic of matter, it must be seen to be, in moral references, entirely metaphorical. We do not, says Ruskin, as in the previous "modes of beauty" it is implied we do, desire material purity because it illustrates or typifies the spiritual ideal, but rather we illustrate a certain quality of moral and spiritual being by reference to the desirability of this particular quality of matter.

Purity, therefore, is not suggested by beautiful things in the same sense that the other moral ideas are; it is desired for its actual material condition: "It is not mere purity, but the active condition of substance which is desired . . . the vital and energetic connection among particles." Purity, therefore, exists as a quality of "typical beauty" in a distinct sense from the other qualities. It is necessary also to that second type of beauty called "Vital" which concerns the "felicitous fulfillment of function in living things."

Now, so far as purity is a condition of beauty it is also a condition of social health. The possible social extensions of the idea are far reaching. Through this one term, connoting material energy on the one hand and beautiful vitality on the other, beauty and life are theoretically related. In so far as art is the expression of ideas of beauty it becomes a pure way of life, which is a great deal more than the satisfaction of unaccountable impulse, or the mere fulfillment of the necessary demands of existence.

Ruskin's discussion of the nature of purity is the point of transition from his theory of beauty to a theory of the social value of art. It is the most pregnant seed of the whole moral and economic doctrine. His social theories did not, as has been claimed, spring from any general notion of art, but from one theoretical element in his concept of beauty. Purity was *the* moral root.

For this reason the dilemma suggested above is profound. The denial of the intrinsic moral significance of purity and the extension of it into the whole field of matter affirm a utilitarian basis for its goodness. But the pleasure that lay in the simple perception of "the active condition of matter" could not remain thus simple in Ruskin's theory, for beauty, he had said, was contemplative. So, as in the case of the representation of fact and the problem of sensation, the materialistic limitations had again to be transcended. Ideality had to be preserved, spirituality attained; for this was what distinguished the sentimental naturalist from the rank materialist. Such transcendence, however, seemed to Ruskin as it did to most early Victorians, a simple matter.

Ruskin accomplished this intellectual transition by following the Christian transcendentalism common to the poetical and even prosaic minded naturalists of both England and America of the first half of the century. The characteristic of matter which seemed to him to distinguish it from spirit was its inertia; yet in this very inertia the mind perceived a more profound because more mysterious characteristic—a ubiquitous presence of energy. If the matter appeared beautiful it would, said Ruskin, be found to possess energy.

The mind, therefore, which truly perceives beauty in the external world spiritualizes matter itself by transcending the quality of inertia. The act is not intellectual; it is "contemplative." Instinctively, the energy in nature

is felt, high emotions are stimulated. From this and other qualities of beauty the moral sense may infer ideal attributes. Thus, because all material works of God are in some degree beautiful, the energy or purity of beautiful matter may typify "that constant presence and energizing of Deity by which all things live and move, and have being"

The argument is very arbitrary and circular, but it is the respectable idealism of Ruskin's period. All one needs is the simple mystical insight which, as Wordsworth said, perceives "a motion and a life through all things," which persuaded Coleridge that imagination was "a dim analogue of creation," and which moved Emerson to write impulsively "Things are emblematic. Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact . . . behind Nature, throughout Nature, Spirit is present." There was no alternative but disillusion. If, like John Stuart Mill, one lacked "insight" or, as Ruskin called it, a profound "moral sense"—then nature must remain forever "dis-mal," meaningless and inert.

#### TYPICAL BEAUTY AND CONTEMPLATION

But Ruskin differed slightly from certain other prophets and poets: from Wordsworth, in that he did not sink himself in nature to avoid facing the instinctive, blind evils of a changing society: from Coleridge, in that his theories grew less intellectual and more practical. He became, like Emerson, less mystical with maturity; but he had never possessed Emerson's literary background. Neither had he read much concerning oriental religions, nor had he become acquainted with the traditional forms of religious pantheism. He would not, I believe, have agreed literally with the young Emerson's declaration: "the currents of Universal Being circulate

through me; I am part and particle of God!" Idealist that he was, Ruskin had enjoyed the discipline of descriptive analysis in his sciences at Oxford; he continued his minute geological and botanical researches for the pleasure of sharp factual discrimination. He did not, even in his early work, force his sentimental "vision" into an elaborate hierarchy of ideas. He was willing to leave his idealism with the generalization that "there are many other evidences of the relation which the material works of God bear to the Human Mind."

It is therefore characteristic of him to avoid neo-Platonic symbolism whenever he comes near it. This indeed is one of his chief differences from Coleridge. Coleridge's theory of beauty, although immensely influenced by German idealism and Schelling in particular, approached intellectual formalism. The formal mould of a thing, Coleridge believed, was what occupied the mind in the experience of beauty.<sup>17</sup> "Man's mind," he said, "is the very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature" but which are "steps and processes of intellect antecedent to consciousness." Now these "steps antecedent to consciousness" are part of the imagination, but they are none the less intellectual for that, for Coleridge believed the imagination itself to be the highest form of intellection. Through an imaginative but also an intellectual symbolism, he said, art should "give the whole ad hominem", he conceived of a possible climax in this process "up to the *perfect form* of a harmonized chaos."

Although the dividing line between sentimental or theological naturalism and neo-Platonism is difficult to follow, it is clearer in Ruskin's theories of art than in the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson and others of the period. Nor does Ruskin at any time follow the conventional neo-Platonic arguments of Mengs, Cousin,

Barry or Fuseli The characters of "Typical Beauty" are not, according to Ruskin, imprinted upon nature for man's sake, but arise "as the necessary perfection of God's working." At all idealistic points Ruskin's theory diverges from the traditional neo-Platonic formulae He inserts some safeguard, some protest against literal symbolism: he quotes Aristotle or Plato directly instead of Plotinus, whom he never mentions

Bosanquet points to Plato's dualism as having turned "the whole perceptible universe into a symbol of ideas."<sup>18</sup> He alludes to the sun-similes in the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* as sources of Christian theological symbolism But he emphatically declares that for Plato himself these images (as all images) were less real than fact from nature and science the myths were, he believes, allegorical rather than symbolic In just this sense were Ruskin's qualities of beauty metaphorical rather than symbolic

The representation of natural fact had for him the greatest value—the value of truth God, truth or abstract idea was not to be seen through any elaborate symbolical representation either in nature or in art, but in so far as they could be experienced at all, were indirectly shown through nature by an emotional inreading of moral metaphor. This was mystical only in so far as it was the result of instinctive moral sense, not intellectual reflection

Ruskin's insistence that his "contemplation" of beauty was non-intellectual, his preposterous definition of it as an accumulation of "high emotions" was just to this end. that he wished to avoid intellectual symbolism. While following Plato rather than Plotinus, he did not share the particular intellectualism of either. Yet to deny intellectualism entirely, whatever his intentions were, appears as paradoxical as his observation of energy in the heart of inertia. Energy must be either a material fact or an

ideal concept; any morality based upon it must run into utilitarianism on the one hand or neo-Platonism on the other. Avoiding the first, Ruskin would not candidly face the second. He resorted to a compromise between feeling and ideals. His "contemplation" is thus naive and sentimental. His demonstration of types in beauty is nothing more than a moral symbolism of a low intellectual order.

The theoretical steps in the compromise are not difficult to follow. Having begun his argument upon an Aristotelian approach, having affirmed the materialistic character of purity, Ruskin then reads into the Greek term *energia* the Platonic associations of the soul with motion and motion with light. From here the naturalistic dogma that all nature is the manifestation of God leads him close to neo-Platonism. He refers back to his "Contemplation" or the right esthetic appreciation of natural beauty and the beauty of art. This, he argues, is itself an energy, instinctive and natural to man. Hence, the evidence of man's appreciation of beauty might itself be regarded as morally typical of "the divine energy of contemplation." By this metaphorical sanction the appreciation of the sensual and impressionistic character of art is justified. It is only upon such interpretation,<sup>19</sup> he feels, that the full significance of the passage at the end of Aristotle's *Ethics* can be comprehended.

"And perfect happiness is some sort of energy of Contemplation, for all the life of the gods is (therein) glad, and that of men, glad in the degree in which some likeness to the gods in this energy belongs to them. For none other of living creatures (but men only) can be happy, since in no way can they have any part in Contemplation."

Not until 1883 did Ruskin admit that this sentence had inspired his whole theory of beauty, nor does he even then see the full extent of what he refers to as "working



the matter out from my own Evangelical points of view." "Evangelical" is precisely the term to characterize both the naturalism and the symbolism Ruskin used. The perversion of Aristotle extended through Plato to Christian mysticism is characteristic; its moral temper is not now obscure.<sup>20</sup> The admired Linné uses "Contemplation" in this "naturalistic" sense—a sense which is both poetic and scientific, though capriciously combined. "Contemplation" of beauty, conceived as "appreciation" and "discovery" (or in common phraseology "creation")<sup>21</sup> is the "way of life" which art presents. This is the healthy, wholesome, moral way—the way to real capacity, true "wealth." At this point Ruskin's social doctrines were conceived, though their mature development depended upon his study of Carlyle's *Past and Present* and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*.

#### RUSKIN'S PATHETIC FALLACY: VITAL BEAUTY

It is clear from what has been said that Ruskin believed health, energy and the organic functioning of parts were the chief sources of beauty. This inner vitality of all beautiful things was positively physical but its significance to man and to art was moral. The "modes of being" or the different degrees of vitality in organic things appeared to him, therefore, to demand a separate exposition. Under the head of "Vital Beauty" he elaborates these moral features with pedantic enthusiasm. His theory demanded that he show how these qualities were the particular concern of contemplation and hence of primary significance to art, but his naturalistic zeal over-reaches the logical requirements of his scheme. His exposition is valuable nevertheless because it demonstrates more perfectly than any comment the extent to which the

poetic idealization of nature was carried by reasonable Victorians

Ruskin explains that the qualities of "Vital Beauty" are objective only in the sense of existing "in our relation to things," not in things themselves, yet this "relation" is itself objectified. Into it are projected the naturalist's dearest sentiments. Our relation to phenomena is said to hold moral abstractions which have no possible material or sensible evidence. They remain the most preposterously rationalized generalities. But they are discussed with a literalness which only his religious naturalism could explain.

A fundamental doctrine of this naturalism was, in the words of Bishop Butler, that "Every species is . . . designed for a particular way of life, to which the nature, the capacities, temper, and qualifications of each species, are necessary. . . ." Butler<sup>22</sup> applies this very sensibly to human beings and the variations of character which "nature directs us to acquire"; but the naturalists of Ruskin's day tried literally to apply it to all forms of organic life. Science had discovered more about these forms; poetry had projected sentimental personality into nature. It was not difficult for a man fascinated by the current methods of scientific description to lose his sense of humor in the laborious task of proving that facts bore out the vision of poets. Ruskin evidently believed they did and he tried to fit his theory of beauty to his convictions. He declared

"That the perfect condition of the Theoretical Faculty rests in two perceptive acts the perception of sympathy for all the appearances of happiness which are exhibited by every being in a perfect state; secondly, the just recognition of examples of moral excellence or deficiency which every creature attains "

So far as art is concerned this is very high-sounding nonsense, but one should not fail to see that Ruskin is carrying into the appreciation of landscape an interest traditionally devoted to figure painting. It had for a long time been popular to emphasize not only the idea of the subject matter of a picture, but the "expression" of the subject. In the eighteenth century this meant something quite different from the now current "expressing oneself," and Ruskin followed the traditional use of the term. "Expression" in art meant the representation of sentimental feelings or moral states of mind, of passions and of spiritual attitudes by the literal or formal gesture of a body and the mood of a countenance. For example in 1806 Sir Charles Bell had published attenuated and amazing *Essays on the Anatomy and Philosophy of Expression as Connected with the Fine Arts*. There was great emphasis on the expression of Christian sentiment and religious attitudes in R10's *Poesie de L'Art Chretienne*; the Academicians all stressed "expression" and "moral types" in their lectures and even Hazlitt admires Raphael most for this sentimental and often dramatic virtue<sup>23</sup>

The translation of such moral sentiment to the beauty of nature was inevitable. Poetry, piety and prose had greatly exploited the relationship of man to nature, and found evidence for the praise of God's wisdom. The same Sir Charles who had written on "Expression" had been chosen by the Royal Society to write one of the *Bridge-water Treatises*. He selected the human hand as the object of his analysis, the proof of his admiration and the illustration of his faith in divine beneficence. Ruskin is therefore objectifying in nature an analogy to an already recognized and popular phase of beauty in pictures. Had his projections of sentiment into the animal kingdom been illustrated from traditionally respected paintings they would have excited no sense of incongruity among his

critics; but he was analyzing natural beauty with the sharp description of the naturalist and the vision of an early Victorian. The result stimulated some sharp criticism; nevertheless, it carried a message that satisfied a large public.

For a twentieth century reader it is difficult to feel that "our full receiving of beauty" always depends first upon moral sensibility and second upon the "moral accuracy and faithfulness of the heart" in its judgments. Yet Ruskin and others of his time who believed in an absolute moral law which was universal and instinctive, who rested what little theoretical psychology they had upon the doctrine of the faculties, these things were not at all impossible. They were almost self-evident to Ruskin, and through them the spiritual virtue in beauty was manifest.

So it is the healthy and vital energy in organic forms, says Ruskin, from which we may infer their happiness. The very inference assumes our sympathy and our delight in their happiness which produce an instinctive judgment of their moral excellence. It may be unjust to state his argument so briefly but his discussion is long and loaded with descriptions of appropriate emotions. Lest "moral excellence" remain vague in its esthetic connection, he illustrates profusely. Sometimes he quotes Wordsworth and sometimes, as in the following, he resorts to his own observations always focusing upon the expression of moral happiness:

"That these moral perfections indeed are causes of beauty in proportion to their expression, is best proved by comparing those features of animals in which they are more or less apparent, as, for instance, the eyes, of which we shall find those ugliest which have in them no expression nor life whatever, but a corpse-like stare, or an indefinite meaningless glaring, as (in some lights) those of owls and cats, and mostly of insects and of all creatures in which *the eye seems rather an*

*external optical instrument, than a bodily member through which emotion and virtue of soul may be expressed as pre-eminently in the chamaeleon, because the seeming want of sensibility and vitality in a creature is the most painful of all wants. And next to these in ugliness, come the eyes that gain vitality indeed, but only in the expression of intense malignity, as in the serpent and alligator, and next, to whose malignity is added the virtue of subtlety and keenness, as of the lynx and hawk, and then, by diminishing the malignity and increasing the expressions of comprehensiveness and determination, we arrive at those of the lion and eagle, and at last, by destroying malignity altogether, at the fair eye of the herbivorous tribes, wherein the superiority of beauty consists always in the greater or less sweetness and gentleness, primarily; as in the gazelle, camel, and ox, and in the greater, or less intellect, secondarily, as in the horse and dog, and, finally, in gentleness and intellect both in man ”*

It may appear that in choosing such a passage I am exaggerating the literalness with which Ruskin discusses these qualities, but it is a very fair example of the degree to which, as we should now say, he was projecting his own sentiments into what he saw. It is quite obvious that the “aesthetic” qualities *per se* have completely disappeared, but this would be justified by the fact that he held “aesthetic” qualities of external form to be the concern merely of the sense, while these higher modes of being are the particular concern of the contemplative faculty.

There is, nevertheless, much more illustration—some of it excellent farce in itself, even to burlesque of his own theory. Particularly choice is the following upon the difference in our sympathy for plants as against animals, and its effect upon our sense of beauty:

“Now there is this difference between the positions held in creation by animals and plants, and thence in the disposi-

tions with which we regard them, that the animals, being for the most part locomotive are capable both of living where they choose, and of obtaining what food they want, and of fulfilling all the conditions necessary to their health and perfection. For which reason they are answerable for such health and perfection, and we should be displeased and hurt, if we did not find it in one individual as well as another.

"But the case is evidently different with plants. They are intended fixedly to occupy many places comparatively unfit for them, and to fill up all the spaces where greenness and coolness, and ornament, and oxygen are wanted, and that with very little reference to their comfort or convenience. Now it would be hard upon the plant, if, after being tied to a particular spot, where it is indeed much wanted, and is a great blessing, but where it has enough to do to live, whence it cannot move to obtain what it needs or likes, but must stretch its unfortunate arms here and there for bare breath and light, and split its way among rocks, and grope for sustenance in unkindly soil, it would be hard upon the plant, I say, if under all these disadvantages, it were made answerable for its appearance, and found fault with because it was not a fine plant of the kind . . ."

The passage, I believe, speaks for itself, and it should be obvious that Ruskin has fallen into what he himself thought was in poetry an inexcusable "pathetic fallacy." The above remarks cannot be taken as the pleasant metaphor of a sentimental gardener who thinks of his flowers as preferring this corner to that. Such a gardener has no theory of the moral constituents of beauty, no ambitious analysis of art.

A second type of "Vital Beauty," which Ruskin pedantically calls "Generic," depends even more upon the projection of moral and naturalistic sentiment into the material world. It consists in our perception "of the more or less perfect fulfillment of function of different individuals in the same species." The abstraction is striking,

for it implies that some conception of this perfect state of development must be felt. Moreover, the development, in this case, is not merely structural or formal, but functional.

Ruskin has carried over from his theory of characteristic truth, the notion of the idealized form of each species, and added to this the incredible abstractions of purpose and moral relationship. It is one thing to infer from an observation of forms some hypothesis of perfect form; such is common in studies of morphology, especially in the reconstruction of a species from a few individuals or fragments. But the hypothetical "felicitous fulfillment of function," applied seriously to the animal world, presents at once moral and teleological fabrications which are nothing short of monstrous.

"The felicitous fulfillment of function" among God's creatures, however, seemed to him a naturally possible object of appreciation. It was the purest act of that intuitive knowledge which is the glory of the highest type of man, which is the universal possession of the race and which, although it had been brutalized and perverted by an iniquitous society, is much more certain than intellectual guessing. No wonder that Ruskin was stirred by *Past and Present* and a few years later became the disciple of Carlyle, who also believed passionately that "revelation through the conscience was primary and immediate." But as yet Ruskin had not found the Scotsman's social interest, nor had he developed the sense of humor that appears sporadically through later writings. He is determined to sanctify landscape. Thus he is sedulously eager to be rational in the proof of his own naturalist's intuition. His search for exact and fair examples is ironically illustrated by the following discussion of how far it is possible to determine—seriously determine—the ideal

form and "the felicitous fulfillment of function" in oysters:

"It is well, when we wish to arrive at truth, always to take familiar instances, wherein the mind is not likely to be biased by any elevated associations or favourite theories. Let us ask therefore, first, what kind of ideal form may be attributed to a limpet or an oyster, that is to say, whether all oysters do or do not come up to the entire notion or idea of an oyster. I apprehend that, of those which are of full size and healthy condition, there will be found many which fulfil the conditions of an oyster in every respect; and that so perfectly, that we could not, by combining the features of two or more together, produce a more perfect oyster than any that we see. I suppose, also, that out of a number of healthy fish, birds or beasts, of the same species, it would not be easy to select an individual as superior to *all* the rest, neither, by comparing two or more of the nobler examples together, to arrive at the conception of a form superior to that of either, but that, though the accidents of more abundant food or more fitting habitation may induce among them some variety of size, strength, and colour, yet the entire generic form would be presented by many, neither would any art be able to add to or diminish from it.

"It is, therefore, hardly right to use the word Ideal of the generic forms of these creatures, of which we see actual examples, but if we are to use it," (and, of course, Ruskin was by his theory compelled to) "then be it distinctly understood that its ideality consists in the full development of all the powers and properties of the creature as such . . . the utmost possible degree of all those properties of beauty, both typical and vital, which it is appointed to possess."

This, as I have said is ironic; it is a tragi-comedy in miniature, for it is in itself an admission of failure in that the too ardent moralist is forced to compromise with his term—and in a struggle with one of the least of God's creatures!



## THE THORNS IN BEAUTY

In conclusion, Ruskin eulogizes nature's highest species. Both "Typical" and "Vital Beauty" are most perfectly realized in man. Greek art, he thought, had most truly represented the beauty of the human form; but this was only half the man: the beauty of character was more perfectly exploited by Christian art. Hence the highest beauty of the Greeks was "typical" only, while the Christian era found the "vital." But in this historical generalization there lay a radical inconsistency which Ruskin could not at this time explain. As with the lowest of God's creatures, so with the highest. he had to admit that his theoretical combination of typical and vital characters did not always fit the facts of experience; the physical and the spiritual appeared at times self-exclusive

If one sought vital beauty there were obvious signs of evil to be avoided, for with evil Ruskin believed no sort of beauty could subsist. It could not subsist, for example, with pride, sensuality, fear or cruelty. His illustrations are all examples of the restrictions of his "noble" morality by a narrow and more or less orthodox piety. This asceticism, characteristic of the second volume of *Modern Painters* and *The Seven Lamps*, prevents also the artistic realization of the qualities called typical. The beauty of line, light, space and color—"Typical Beauty"—sometimes interferes with the beauty called "vital." The lively colors in which a fierce or cruel animal is clothed tend often to interfere with the perception of its happiness and its moral excellence. The beauty of human form, Ruskin felt, often led artists to worship the nude and definitely distracted the soul from the rightful contemplation of human "expression" (or spiritual attitudes).

This inconsistency, for it is inconsistent that typical

and vital beauty should conflict, Ruskin admits quite honestly. In the case of animals he is at a loss for an explanation. But he is certain that "*there is no high beauty in any slothful animal*": the oyster falls short of idealization. In the case of the nude human body which, according to his naturalism, should mirror the highest "typical" characters, he is at no loss whatever; he perversely tries to deny the typical beauty of the naked form, at least for Englishmen and those unaccustomed to it; and would, if such a thing were possible, dismiss it from art.

This gesture of his moral sense throws the hopeless inconsistency of his theory and his feelings into plain view. He is forced to admit that vitality, energy, unity of parts and health do not always produce holiness. Nor does soul culture often encourage the most typical beauties of bodily health. Holiness indeed seems often to interfere with the manifestation of typical beauty. As he admits, Ruskin has no explanation to offer. But he hastens to deny that this unhappy state of affairs is, as puritanically-minded critics might affirm, the result of "The Adamite Curse." Yet he condones the Christian sacrifice of the body for the spirit; he tries to hold it is as evidence of the nobility of man.<sup>24</sup>

Typical and vital beauty are thus shown to be abstractions which have in themselves little importance, but are significant as they reflect conflicting moral attitudes upon which Ruskin's classifications of beauty are based. There is no logical discrepancy in the esthetic scheme itself, the contradiction lies deeper. Ruskin has been said by F. W. Roe never to have confounded "a large noble morality with a narrow and orthodox piety."<sup>25</sup> Yet the central conflict in his theory of beauty is, if it is not a confounding, at least a radical confusion of two kinds of morality.

The generalization arises, it seems to me, from the fact that this excellent commentator is studying Ruskin mainly from the social and economic point of view and from the writings that were, under the influence of Carlyle, composed between 1860 and 1875 when Ruskin's "noble morality" was largely substituted for his earlier piety. Certainly, the more obvious character of typical beauty rests upon moral notions that are materialistic, relative and exceedingly broad. But in the case of vital beauty the moral basis is sentimental and prudish to an extreme; the ascetic tendency is almost ostentatious.

That Ruskin should unconsciously fall into the trap set for him, not by his intellectual talents, but by his emotional associations, was assured by his early nineteenth century education. What directions of the way could be heeded, what clarifications of puzzles could arise from Aristotle, Plato and the realistic Locke, when his own eyes followed the obliquities of prejudice, fixed by his environment and fostered by his parents? His whole essay is an attempt to rationalize contrary loyalties. The irony of his situation is beautifully expressed in his own aphorism: ". . . and though we cannot, while we feel deeply, *reason* shrewdly, yet I doubt if, *except* when we feel deeply, we can ever *comprehend* fully; . . ." It is needless to protest that his comprehension both of the world and of himself grew with the years, though it is pitiful to record that its fullest development was coincident with periodic insanity!

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## CHAPTER III

### IMAGINATION

#### THE BOGEY OF IMAGINATION

SIX years intervened between the publication of the second and the third volumes of *Modern Painters*. In this period Ruskin devoted himself to architectural criticism. He was eager to call public attention to the beautiful buildings falling into ruin in France and Italy. He was also anxious to protest against the false restorations which an uncritical enthusiasm for Gothic was encouraging. His theory of architecture, outlined in *The Seven Lamps* and historically demonstrated in *Stones of Venice*, was largely an application of certain principles derived from his analysis of beauty. In no way was his theory of representation changed, nor the moral character of his analysis of esthetic contemplation. The emphasis, however, shifted gradually from an interest in natural truth to principles of decorative design and with this change there appeared two new theoretical developments. He realized as never before the esthetic and moral importance of skill or fine workmanship; he slowly but certainly discovered the relevance of social conditions to artistic aims and so began to work out his final conclusions upon the meaning of art to society.

For a few years more, however, both the theory of skill and the political economy of art remained unstated in any complete form. He returned in 1852 to the composition of *Modern Painters*. There was still much to

consider if he was ever to complete the treatise on landscape which, with his awakened interest in Italian art, had grown to a general criticism of painting old and new. Nor were the esthetic issues fully developed. He had considered appreciation in detail but he had scarcely begun discussing the active or creative side of art. His study of medieval carving, sculpture, building and missal painting had thrown new light upon the values which could arise from artistic work; his teaching in the Workingmen's College was demonstrating these values intimately; finally, his sympathy for and defense of a group of modern painters, now called Pre-Raphaelites, was forcing him to state more precisely the principles of artistic composition.

Returning to the theoretical questions which he had laid by, Ruskin found himself impatient with the orderly and balanced classification of the material in the first two volumes. He now regarded these abstract schema as the regrettable weaknesses of youthful theorizing. He did not realize that the outlines of his theoretical concepts had become definite only through the discipline of these earlier arguments. He could not be expected to perceive how much of his assurance rested upon this impetuous though pedantic casuistry. It was not till 1877, when age had sharpened his anger against what he considered the misguided and immoral opinions of the new generation, that he found virtue in just those arbitrary schema of which for years he had disapproved.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, it is obvious to one following the windings of Ruskin's thought that the brilliant chapters of the third volume on "The Grand Style" and on "The False and True Ideal" could not have been composed so freely had the structure of his theory not already been worked out with fullness and definition. If this earlier systematization approaches pedantry, the later writings more often

egregiously lack definition. It is the scheme of the second volume itself which allows Ruskin to summarize so neatly, at a later time, the approach he had taken to the esthetic experience. The volume, he says, "divides the faculties of the mind concerned in the contemplation of Nature into two great branches—one passive, the other active, one receiving delight from external things, the other so modifying and regarding external things, as to increase this delight. The passive power I called *Theoria*, the active, *Imagination*. The adoption of the term *Theoria* was pure pedantry."

But pure pedantry, sometimes less innocuous to constructive thinking than in this case, had nevertheless the virtue of defining precisely what he had left undone and unsaid; the essence of the active esthetic experience had yet to be found and analyzed. He realizes that he had not quite laid all the ghosts of theoretical tradition. The bogey of "*Imagination*" now squarely blocked his way. Far from belittling its theoretical importance, Ruskin again puts on his academic armor, revives the tactics of pedantic adventure which he thought he had foresworn and, by formal contention and analysis, complicates an already august mystery.<sup>2</sup> First, he proposes to clear the ground of popular misconceptions, second, to combat the erroneous uses of the term *imagination* by certain writers on taste whom he called the "*metaphysicians*"; third, to describe the active character of *imagination*.

The popular errors, he believes, are all variations of one general mistake. Just as ideas of beauty are degraded by the popular mind to "*mere impressions of sense*" so the function of *imagination* is considered to be one of falsehood: "that its operation is to exhibit things as they are *not*, and that in so doing it mends the work of God."<sup>3</sup> Of such implications Ruskin will have none. Whether he meant it or not, his statement amounts to an attack

upon neo-classical concepts of imagination and those also of the psychological writers on esthetics. In reference to imaginative literature he perceived that a similar fallacy is often the justification of fiction "that is any kind of fiction"; especially the so-called romantic books that are "but simple slavish, unpalliated falsehood and exaggeration"

Ruskin's criticism of the erroneous uses of the term centers upon two principal figures, Dugald Stewart, the Scotch philosopher, whose analysis of imagination in his *Elements of The Philosophy of the Human Mind* seemed to Ruskin to miss the point, and Alison, whose *Essays on Taste* seemed to him dangerously superficial in their psychological approach. With these William Taylor, whose theory of imagination in *English Synonyms Described* had already been criticized by Wordsworth in 1815,<sup>4</sup> shares the distinction of being scornfully classed among "the metaphysicians." Stewart's analysis was highly formal but took a psychological approach to the problem of imagination, Alison, as I have shown, candidly analyzed taste and the experience of beauty into complex developments of the psychological principle of the association of ideas, Taylor shared somewhat the position of Stewart and confused, as Wordsworth said, imagination with fancy. Ruskin's attack, with the exception of his disagreement with Stewart, is general.

Ruskin's contention that the appreciation of beauty is instinctive was supported by a belief in the divine origin of our instincts and our moral life. The theories of Alison and all those who used the doctrine of association were contrary to this fundamental belief, they argued from environment and psychology. It was thus inevitable that Ruskin should consider them superficial in that they avoided the truly natural and the divine. Coleridge would have undoubtedly agreed with him in

this, yet Ruskin's analysis follows the lead of Wordsworth rather than of Coleridge; at this time he was unaware that there existed a difference between the principles of the two men. He had read Coleridge's poems many times and he had read Wordsworth's prefaces, but he does not till a later date seem to have read either Coleridge's *Table Talk* or *Biographia literaria*.<sup>5</sup> Ruskin differed from Coleridge largely in that he believed imagination ultimately inexplicable; the fact that it was instinctive ensured its mystery.

The "ambitious theorists of taste," however, tried to explain imagination, like beauty, on the principle of association of ideas, which Ruskin was certain it transcended. They confused imagination with fancy which, because it consists of wit, invention, memory and sense imagery they believed could "be taught and easily comprehended and analyzed." But imagination, Ruskin said, is indifferent to conventional opinion and unlike opinion cannot be taught. Real imagination for Ruskin meant something intuitive, the gift of genius; in its truest form he thought it "the highest intellectual power of man."<sup>6</sup> Thus, without what he considered the presumption of the metaphysician, but with his own willful observation, Ruskin proceeded to describe what he could of the mystery.

The specific criticism of Stewart<sup>7</sup> and Alison led him to define first how imagination functioned in the artistic process and finally what its general form and nature were. He observes that the external sources of beauty in any great work of art are not presented as pure transcripts from nature "They have been modified by the influences of reflective mind." But he does not dissect this process of modification as it occurs in the actual painting or drawing of pictures; rather, he examines the results to discover the "powers of mind" which have formed the



whole object of art. Ruskin merely presents certain clues or signs by the presence of which in a piece of art one may judge whether or not true imagination has functioned; and, in good Victorian fashion, he argues from an ideal case.

It seemed to him that imagination might ordinarily be supposed to deal with conceptions of material things which are visual, not verbal (the number of flowers in a garden patch and their botanical names are verbal concepts, their shape, color and specific appearance are visual concepts and become the material of imagination).<sup>8</sup> Practically all writers upon imagination, he says, have agreed that it selects and discards certain images from these conceptions, putting them down in some order or other and thus "composing" them. Most writers have observed that such a composition necessitates a principle of agreeableness in the association of the various elements. Low minds, indulging in the most vulgar fancy, usually disregard the relation of one image to another, liking each for itself. But poets and painters have some principle of combination which insures predominating effects that may vary; they may be brilliant, vivid, systematic, interesting, curious or entertaining. All cases of such combination are what Ruskin means by "Fancy."

But real imagination differs from fancy in complexity, in the reality of its effect and in the importance of its emotional power. ". . . Mere collection of the most agreeable features from various scenes," says Ruskin, "is the power of ordinary industry, and is rather the folly of vulgar minds than the strength of distinguished ones." The faculty of imagination, simply defined, is considerably beyond this; it is "the power of seeing anything we describe as if it were real; so that, looking at it as we describe (or paint), points may strike us which will give a vividness to the description that would not

have occurred to vague memory, or been easily borrowed from the expression of other writers." Thus, imaginative reality is more vivid than fanciful in the sense that the thing imagined is more truly characterized.

Several writers had defined imagination in a very similar manner, but their discussions, if indeed he really knew them, Ruskin found inadequate. The fact that Ruskin calls the imagination "the highest intellectual power" and the fact that he holds natural appearances, as they are represented in art, to "have been modified by the influence of reflective mind," might argue that he had been reading Coleridge. His separation of fancy from imagination, moreover, is close to that which Coleridge introduces in the fourth chapter of the *Biographia literaria*. But if Ruskin read this chapter, it is, so far as signs of influence indicate, the extent of his study of Coleridge. Neither does he profit by the historical sketch of Aristotle and Hartley which Coleridge gives, nor does he follow the metaphysical argument relating imagination to a theory of knowledge.

Ruskin distinguishes between a reproductive and a transcendental function, but he does not explain metaphysically how the imagination determines phenomena in what Kant or Schelling or Coleridge regarded as an intellectual and universally productive capacity. He offers no metaphysical basis for the active and passive phases of the self in its relation to an object in the external world. For Coleridge, "the power which determines" was also "the power which is determined"; the very magic of imagination lay in the fact that "the subject becomes its own object and subject and object are therefore identical" <sup>9</sup> It is this metaphysical unity, in what Coleridge called the "primary" imagination, that made it possible for him to hold the imagination as "the prime agent of all human Perception" and as "a repetition in

the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM." <sup>10</sup>

None of this kind of speculation ever entered Ruskin's head, his writing is in no sense metaphysical, nor does his theory confer on the imagination an intellectual function. He does not believe that the artist "must from his own mind *create* forms according to the severe laws of *intellect* . . . which assimilates him to nature, and enables him to understand her." <sup>11</sup> Ruskin's ideal artist perceives nature as a naturalist, naively, with no subtle inner involution of "subject or object." He does not *create* in himself—he *discovers*, he follows not so much the laws of intellect as those of his moral nature. Although imagination, by its instinctive relation to the moral sense, has "consciousness of God," it does not, as for Coleridge it does, "interpret in the light of that consciousness the symbolism of the visible world." <sup>12</sup> Ruskin, as I have said, apprehended the world as common sense fact, he conceived only a moral or emotional symbolism for beauty; beautiful qualities were "typical" of spiritual truths by moral, not by intellectually symbolic forms.

Apparently uninfluenced by Coleridge's more philosophical theory, Ruskin remains at the opposite pole of esthetics. But he is very near to Wordsworth, especially in his approach to the questions of spiritual content in imaginative art which the English "metaphysicians" were explaining by a theory of mechanical association. <sup>13</sup> Wordsworth, in the *Preface* to the 1815 edition of his poems, had shown how far short Taylor came from accounting for "the spiritual attributes bodied forth by poets' pens"; and how completely ignorant he seemed of the creative nature of imagination. Wordsworth had illustrated certain properties of imagination which distinguished it from "mere fancy," the faculty which Coleridge had

pompously called "The Aggregative and Associative power." Wordsworth described several attributes: the first he called a "conferring power," that by which properties are added to an image which has been evoked; the next, that power which imagination has to abstract qualities from an object; thirdly, he described the complex power which imagination possesses in making one image modify another; finally, he elaborated what he called the "creative power" of imagination, by which it may dissolve numbers into unity and separate unity into numbers—a power "governed by sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers."

Ruskin takes advantage of these suggestions, which he had studied for profit. He agrees with Wordsworth that Taylor makes imagination little more than a mode of memory, and he proceeds to criticise Stewart in much the same fashion as Wordsworth had criticised Taylor. He found that Stewart did not perceive anything beyond the power of fancy; that he had no conception of how truthful imagination could be, that he, like other metaphysicians, "had little understanding of this faculty as it functioned actually in poetry or in art." Ruskin even constructed a division of "powers" not unlike Wordsworth's. He found three aspects which distinguished imagination<sup>14</sup> from any other faculty of the mind: an "Associative" power, a "Penetrative" power and a "Contemplative" power. He did not regard them as separate psychological steps in the process of composition, nor indeed as separate faculties, but rather, as modes of the operation of mind known as imagination. They are defined almost entirely in terms of their results.

#### THE MYSTERIOUS "POWERS"

The lowest of imaginative powers Ruskin calls the "Associative." It consists in the ability to combine images

in agreeable association, and is thus identical with what is ordinarily called fancy. But Ruskin is anxious that fancy shall be understood to function dependently in all truly fine art or literature, he therefore changes the name and explains that "the power of Association" achieves distinction only when subservient to a principle of formal unity; when, in other words, it is not mere unlicensed fancy.

Imaginative metaphor as distinguished from mere fanciful imagery illustrates this contention, for the agreeable association of elements in metaphor attain meaning very largely through the formal unity of their combination. Sympathy or contrast in these elements may seem to supply a kind of form to a fanciful image, but a metaphor or a truly imaginative image (whether in literature or plastic art) must exist as "a whole organized body of dependent members." In such cases, the elements themselves are often incomplete (as in a fanciful image they seldom are), and it is their imperfection and hence their dependence upon one another that produces the organic unity of their relation.

The principle observed in this discussion of unity is nothing more than the principle of organic proportion already explained as a character of beauty. Here, as distinct from balance, it appears a primary law of imaginative activity. The interdependence of otherwise imperfect parts is the necessary and sufficient condition of an imaginative passage in art as distinct from one that is fanciful,<sup>15</sup> for this principle of unity selects and organizes the associated concepts in real images.

But the very conception of facts in a single image implies a second and no less important power. This, as Ruskin describes it, is "a mode of apprehending" what is selected. It is concerned with the organizing of perceptive elements. "Imagination," he says, "always seizes by

the innermost point"; it gets at the essence of the thing. If the actual artistic process is examined it will be discovered that this act is intuitive, accomplished without reasoning. One may compare, for example, the usual imagery of Milton with that of Dante. Milton's imagery is largely fanciful, external, while Dante's imagination penetrates to the center; the distinction consists in the superior degree of Dante's intuitive penetration.

This "penetrative Power," Ruskin thinks, can scarcely be considered formal, though it has to do with the form of an image. It operates coincidently with the principle of organic unity, it is Ruskin's explanation of artistic originality. True artists, he believed, never strive for "newness" or novelty but for "genuineness", they rely upon their "faculty of getting to the spring of things and working out from that." It is necessary for the true artist not only to address the feelings of the beholder through the intellect, but "to convey as much as possible the general emotions arising out of the real scene into the spectator's mind." If one looks at the result of truly imaginative art upon the beholder (or reader, as in poetry) it will be clear that his mind literally "is forced to act in a certain mode." There is thus a demand upon the artist; he must "make sure of us" and "force us whether we will or not, to walk his way."

Here, Ruskin observes, lies the great danger in the artistic process, for it is easy to confuse sensibility with sensitive penetration. Sensitive feeling reaches below sentiment with the more real power of penetrating to the truth;<sup>16</sup> sensibility merely plays on the surface. At this point, too, lies the danger in academic instruction which often fails because it misleads the student into following a precept rather than his intuitive imagination.<sup>17</sup> The fact that this penetrative power cannot be taught is no reason for substituting rules. The artist who works

from theory, Ruskin believes, is doomed: "his whole soul is instinct with lies, no veracity can come within hail of him, to him all regions of right and life are for ever closed "

Ruskin was convinced that imagination must be trusted, if for no other reason than that its perfect function is the intuitive perception of "Ultimate Truth" Imagination, he said, "sees to the heart", composing legalism invariably errs. Imagination has no respect for opinions of any sort, "knowing in itself when it has invented truly." Though few men possess its full powers, those that do cannot err. These men cannot be taught for "their Imagination does not itself know or care, any more than the peasant laboring with his spade and axe, what is wanted to meet our theories and our fancies " Yet the moral danger of counterfeit intuition is great. Stupid and insensitive works are often by mere suggestiveness considered fine The Retsch illustrations to Schiller's *Kampf mit dem Drachen* (compared to Turner's *Jason*) are perfect examples of vulgar imagination or fancy parading as penetrative

There are certain common signs of fine imagination in art. Real images in painting and poetry are often simple, sometimes giving the appearance of vacancy, but their value may be shown to depend upon the "truth, authority and inevitability of their suggestiveness." Moreover, the supreme strength of imagination always depends upon "Habitual reference to nature," for only by such habitual reference may it perceive "characteristic truth."

#### THE MAGIC OF ABSTRACTION. A RELIGIOUS ADDITION WITH TECHNICAL IMPORTANCE

The two preceding powers Ruskin regards as the chief attributes of the "Imaginative Faculty" There is, how-

ever, another aspect of imaginative activity which he describes as a habit or mode of operation rather than a power. This consists in depriving subjects of material and bodily shape, developing only those qualities which are chosen for a particular purpose and forging those qualities into abstract groups or forms

Such transformation is possible because of the indefiniteness in the very nature of our conception of things; a vagueness which exists in most people's memories still allows them recognition of objects the detailed contents of which may be missing. The imagination, aided by the associative fancy, takes advantage of this indefiniteness and proceeds to abstract certain qualities above others for a certain purpose which is determined by the form in which the mind has chosen to regard the remembered or seen objects.

This form (the term is mine and not Ruskin's) may be determined by various causes: by the particular regard for the object arising from the artist's sensibilities, by forgotten associations or by his penetrative intuition of truth. The purpose may thus be the idealization of a sentiment or the profound expression of some truth. The actual method of abstracting is nothing more than the willful neglect of some elements and the forceful accentuation of others. Such a process or "way of operation" Ruskin terms "Contemplative Imagination."

To his theory this category is very important: it covers a number of difficulties that he would not otherwise be able to explain. It is through the contemplative power that all literary, religious and ideal "Ideas" are introduced into art. But Ruskin does not appear to be aware of the fact that this type of imagery is really part of his last category, "Ideas of Relations." He had been trying to avoid, as I have said, his earlier schematic divisions, even though he had not yet clearly defined the limits of



his final category. In this third volume, moreover, he is more concerned with examining the active or imaginative aspect of esthetics than with completing his analysis of "the Ideas" which all art may convey. At any rate Ruskin avoids using a very ordinary term which he believed confusing, but which precisely fits the type of artistic expression he describes

The word idealize exactly connotes the imaginative act he is discussing. It had enjoyed a considerable popularity in the critical theories of the Academicians and had worked into all the literary discussions of imagination. But Ruskin appears to consider his own views different from previous analyses and they are, to be sure, distinct from the neo-classical theories, from Alison, Dugald Stewart, Taylor and Coleridge. Yet Hazlitt, evidently unknown to him, had discussed "the ideal in art" some thirty odd years before and, with much simpler arguments, had arrived at very similar conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

Ruskin, however, observed a psychological characteristic of this abstract composition which, so far as I can discover, was unnoticed by other writers up to his time. In his discussion of appreciation he had noted "love of the object" as one of the principal emotions. In his analysis of imaginative composition he observes an important corollary which lies behind the artist's intense concentrated regard of the object "whether seen or remembered." The creative artist, says Ruskin, is motivated by love: he is consumed with a great desire for possession of the object and the possession is accomplished by penetrating to its center, by imaginatively organizing its elements and by abstracting certain beautiful qualities: in short, by the actual artistic realization of it

Ruskin was less fully aware of this phase of the creative process when he was writing the analysis of appreciation in volume two of *Modern Painters*. In volume five

he added a quaint warning against the excess of imaginative ardor and the need for temperance to moderate "the avarice of the imagination." Perhaps this was because he had himself indulged in a rather mystical description of the whole matter:

"I mean by it (imagination) here, the entire operation of the Humanity within us, the sum of the mental powers which, at the sight of any object, are set to work *to take possession of it*, which contemplate its nature, perceive and admire its peculiar virtues, or which refresh it with wonder, sanctify it with association and gild or darken it with the subtle dyes of hope and memory, and I understand this power to be operating altogether, like notes of music, but all forming a perfect harmony"

It is a temptation, with passages like this, to read in more than was meant; but it will not, I think, seem fanciful to suggest the similarity between this account of imaginative regard and modern accounts of the part which the "self" plays in both the appreciative and the creative aspects of the esthetic experience. We are all aware of what the modern psychological student of esthetics has called the identification of the self with the object, but few people are aware of the elusive distinction between this and that supposedly different state of mind of the religious mystic.<sup>19</sup>

Ruskin's word contemplative is therefore an unfortunate term because it throws the reader off the point. What Ruskin is attempting to explain by "contemplative abstraction" is more simply today called idealized distortion or "idealizing." In metaphor, also the concrete embodiment of abstract ideas generally involves distortion or idealization. But it is natural that Ruskin should consider abstraction peculiar to religious or philosophical themes because of the traditional religious character of

figure painting and much lyric poetry. Hence he is led to declare that the contemplative mode cannot be expressed by art except within very narrow limits. Because he is so concerned with a limited subject matter, Ruskin fails to discern the possibilities of abstraction, distortion and emphasis in the plastic elements of space, line and color. Focussing upon literary and religious figures, he misses the more subtle emotional qualities that arise as complex groups of feeling from the rich designs of the plastic arts.

It is not difficult to see why this occurred. He was discussing what he had called an "Idea of Relation." He was presenting a corollary in the active side of the esthetic experience to the religious awe and reverence that characterized the highest level of "contemplative" appreciation. He was describing the active objectifying of these emotions by the artist. Ruskin was forced later to include in his final category the feelings arising from the mere decorative abstractions of line, space and color. But he had not yet written his technical treatises and he was still enough influenced by his early scheme to regard these pure esthetic delights as "Ideas of Typical Beauty," not "Ideas of Relation" or the expression of ideals.

#### ANALYZING BEYOND THE VICTORIAN VISION

Ruskin nevertheless describes four principal modes of abstraction in the fine arts. Form and color may be separated: either may be abstractly considered, the one in sculpture, as is illustrated by medieval and Renaissance pieces, the other in the particularly rich passages of painting such as those found in canvases by Tintoret or Turner or Titian or Giorgione.<sup>20</sup> Again both color and form may be abstracted and rendered without texture, as in the work of Landseer and more often than not in

the painting of Veronese. "This is realism at the expense of ideality, it is treatment essentially unimaginative."

Finally, a large class of abstractions may be found in architecture and decoration abstractions of animal form, of symbolical objects and the geometrical ornament in architectural decoration <sup>21</sup> Among these ornamental types Ruskin finds many instances of powerful contemplative or ideal imagination. The volumes of *Stones of Venice* are packed with examples and his direct assestion in *Modern Painters* proves how seriously he took the contemplative or ideal elements in these patterns: "only be it always observed that it is not rudeness and ignorance of art, but intellectually awful abstraction that I would uphold: . . ."

The most interesting feature of Ruskin's attempt to refer all forms of imaginative design to the contemplative ideas in them appears in his discussion of "Exaggeration." This, he believes, is often the vice of bad artists and is allowable only under certain limits, lawful "only as the sole means of arriving at truth of impression." There are three principal types: there is the grand scale of representation developed by Michael Angelo; there is the exaggeration proper and just concerning objects which have in nature a variable scale; and there is the lawful reduction of scale in view of the limitations of any specific medium. His phrases sound severe and conservative, but if his principles are carefully read it will be obvious that several kinds of artistic expression, still called "modern," were justified by them.

Ruskin himself did not perceive their scope; he could not have realized that his principles were to justify "Impressionism" in others than Turner. Yet his justification of exaggeration, or as we should now call it, distortion, on the grounds of arriving at a "truth of impression when strict fidelity is out of the question," is a very familiar

modern defense. When he turned to the study of technique it was typical of Ruskin to forget his scheme, his conscience and his moral generalities. It is not unusual to find him practicing a kind of untruth in his own landscape sketching and more than once he justifies the most willful distortion in canvases by Turner.<sup>22</sup> A good example of the extent to which he could take liberties with the strict laws of fidelity and distort nature for no religious purpose—merely for impressionistic pleasure—is the following:

"Now for instance, in my Coniston cottage, it happened, from the point where I sat, that I could not see an inch of mountain over the trees. I have, nevertheless, put in the whole mass of the Old Man—why? Because the eye, in reality, falls on that cottage when it is full of the forms and feeling of mountain scenery, and judges by comparison with it, it feels its peculiar beauty only as a *mountain* cottage, and can return to a mountain by turning an eighth of the compass. But I cannot turn you in a single sketch, I cannot give you the feeling that it is a bit of mountain scenery, without giving you a single touch of mountain blue. I am, therefore, in conscience, telling less of a lie by raising the Old Man a thousand feet, than by giving to the eye the idea of a lowland cottage.

"Another character of this cottage is seclusion. The turnpike road was a violation of this, I turned it out of my way, or, rather did what you might have done—leaped the wall, and sketched with my back to it."

Such justification of impressionistic license proves beyond a doubt that Ruskin is often more interested in "poetic" truth than in the literal or exact truth of appearance which he often declares is his criterion. All the way through his criticism of Turner and the Venetians one finds arguments of this kind, which indicate that what he meant by "Ideas of Truth" was often merely

"Impressions." When he justifies imaginative selection, abstraction and distortion by observing that "the eye is full of feeling"; when, even in the above case, he raises the mountain and leaps the wall, he is doing one of the things that Impressionists and Post Impressionists carried into their treatment of any or all subject matter.

Ruskin's intention, however, in this exposition of the contemplative mode of imagination, was to present a basis for idealistic and religious abstraction which would in some measure explain "the art of great inspiration." A corollary to the idealistic awe of "theoretic" appreciation was necessary to his analysis of the active process of art. Thus, from principles of real technical importance Ruskin outlined hypothetical laws for conceiving "the Superhuman Ideal." They are projections from his observations of abstract and ideal forms. Furthermore, it is through this imaginative abstraction that Ruskin accounts for the appearance in art of his final great class of ideas: "Ideas of Relation." Though he tried to regard these chiefly as moral, they are a confusing combination of intellectual ideas with the features of abstract design. Their expression involved him in a study of the technical character of what we ordinarily call great style.

#### HARNESSING THE BOGEY TO BEAUTY AND TRUTH

In spite of the pompous pedantry of his terms, Ruskin's encounter with the mysterious "Powers" contributed much to his esthetic system. By the preceding analysis he related the difficult and intangible notion of imagination to his theory of representative truth in art.<sup>23</sup> He had also accounted for several of the most elusive qualities ordinarily associated with imaginative expression in poetry and plastic art. The principle of formal unity, coincidentally active with the penetrative unity of vision,

accounts for the qualities of "sincerity" in imaginative expression, <sup>24</sup> of "beauty" in imaginative expression, and for the so-called "reality" of imaginative expression.

By a much more reasonable explanation than the doctrine of "Theoria," the chasm between the real and the ideal had been bridged. For Ruskin the true ideal of all art was what he liked to call the "naturalist ideal." But how to explain its compound nature; how to analyze it into components of representative truth and beauty, and relate these to the imagination? This was the heavy task which he faced when he returned to the continuation of *Modern Painters*. The tedious analysis of imagination was essayed, I believe, that he might discriminate between various artistic idealisms in his third volume, for he could not talk of artistic ideals till he had discussed the character of their formation.

One of the most difficult of his tasks, however, was not fully accomplished by the preceding analysis of imagination. The active side of achieving characteristic truth was explained, the active sincerity, the emotional depth involved in forming beautiful objects were indicated. In the very acts of arranging, harmonizing, unifying, the imagination was following the typical moral symbols of beauty discussed at length in my previous chapter. Moderation, unity and proportion definitely operated in artistic composition as principles of the penetrative and unified grasp of truth. But the assumption of the relation of "Beauty" and "Truth" remained implicit, it was not explicitly revealed. Ruskin's theoretical joining of these abstractions is to be found only in a number of varied and scattered passages. A summary is difficult but possible.

Beauty and truth are not identical. Truth is not beauty any more than it is reality.<sup>25</sup> "Truth and Beauty are very distinct, though often closely related things." "They are

indeed separable; but it is wrong to separate them" (in art); "they are to be sought together in the order of their worthiness, that is to say Truth first, Beauty afterwards." They should never be inconsistent, the so-called beauty which is in art inconsistent with truth must be considered false, and the art unrealized. The discovery of truth is partly intellectual, but—in art—partly imaginative, as has been shown, and the cultivation of the "penetrative" power of imagination (he does not know how far by effort it can be cultivated) is dependent on the acuteness of moral emotion, or the "moral sense."

Ruskin's precise relation of the "moral sense" to a perception of truth is clear, it seems to me, in the following: "The discovery of truth is in itself altogether intellectual, dependent merely on our powers of physical perception and abstract intellect, wholly independent of our moral nature. Yet these instruments (perception and judgment) are so sharpened and brightened . . . far more swiftly and effectively used when they have the energy and passion of our moral nature to bring them into action." Thus, what we call merely the acuteness of bodily sense is associated with love, which stimulates that sense, and, as Ruskin says, "hallows the physical perception of external objects by association, gratitude, veneration and other pure feelings of our moral nature." In the appreciation of art and nature the contemplative faculty turns the intellectual elements of perceptive truth to emotional purpose. So, in the making or conceiving of art objects the "Contemplative Power" of the imagination performs a similar service: the fact is made emotionally (or morally) significant.

The theoretical provinces of beauty and morality are so closely related in Ruskin's mind that they approach identification. Certainly in moments of unguarded statement there is sufficient confusion to result in a failure to



distinguish the experience of art from the experience of the common show of the world, though this is much more typical of his middle than of his earlier writing. His theory of representation, however, was well enough established to clear up part of this confusion; his application of the principle of "characteristic truth" to the phenomena of imagination leads to the theory of the "Penetrative Power" which has just been stated.

The importance of sense data to the creative representation of natural fact is clear; but I suggested in an earlier chapter that the recording of the exact degree of perfection which any individual in a species has realized necessarily involved imagination: the act of conceiving the perfect ideal is imaginative. The only basis or ground for this imaginative act in Ruskin's theory is the large accumulation of facts that the artist has gathered through observation. It is not a scheme of ideas from reason. Hence the data of sense actually constitute the substance of truth, but we must remember that this is truth of appearance, not ultimate reality in a scientific or metaphysical sense.

Truth, then, or the body of natural fact, is the basis for imagination in art. Even the elements of fancy are facts. The results of artistic imagination in contrast to inartistic, are tangible, distinguishable and clear, because they are true. Yet at the same time, this faculty of imagination, thought of as instinctive rather than intellectual, is the only human faculty that can, in art, approach the representation of perfect reality. And such reality is conceived as ideal. Its ideality, moreover, is moral, not intellectual, as Ruskin demonstrated in the analysis of beauty. Artistic reality or the form of truth is achieved, therefore, by the instinctive "Contemplative Power" of imagination, over and above the mass of representative

fact. Thus artistic reality is manifestly emotional or moral. This is the inevitable conclusion.

But confusing elements entered into the relationship of truth, beauty and imagination. When he discussed the "Contemplative Power," and when he discussed later, a variety of styles, Ruskin drew into the content of emotional contemplation many ideas which pertained to the religious or spiritual subject matter of art. In the attempt to relate the formal character of imagination to "moral emotions" he became tangled in supernatural fancies or in the limitations of Victorian propriety. Thus again, he failed to keep the central moral element of his esthetic system simply emotional or, on the other hand, sufficiently intellectual, to avoid confusion. But much of this confusion provides the most interesting matter in his criticism of pictures, it intensifies the vividness of his capricious judgments.

In the preceding chapter I am particularly indebted to the Introductions and Index to the Library Edition of Ruskin's Works by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MORALITY OF PICTURE MAKING

#### IMAGINATIVE IDEALISM

THE effort to objectify beauty so as to talk about its constituents one by one led Ruskin, as has been shown, from God to the oyster and back again. It is not merely that when he objectified his appreciation of line, color and quality, these turned into abstract enormities, but that his appreciation also gathered up his sentiments and the particular group of emotions which he called moral. These, when interpolated into the organic and inorganic nature about him, transformed the universe into a vast reflection of this man's sensibility at once pathetic and ludicrous. The theoretical analysis of imagination, however, depended less than the study of beauty upon this objectification of sentiment. In seeking the moral modes of active composition, Ruskin remained within a more reasonable circle of inference—the circle of the human self. But because of the limited psychology which he followed and because of the vagueness of the central moral emotions which he believed motivated the artist, Ruskin was unable to trace sharply the fundamental moral relation of the appreciation of artistic truth and beauty to their creation.

His views on the problem of representative truth in art pointed clearly to two important moral conditions: love, it was found, stimulates the acuteness of bodily sense; moral emotion sharpens the perception and judg-

ment of the intellect. In the chapter on "Imagination," two more general opinions concerning the relation of morals and art were evident: imaginative beauty, it was said, is achieved by an instinctive but formal unity of members which depends upon a right condition of the heart, and, finally, all imaginative art presents noble grounds (in its sensuous matter and in its subjects) for noble emotions. Moral notions, in short, lie at the base of each phase of the appreciation and the creation of art objects; they are more consistently present than in the theories of any other English writer on esthetics of the period from 1700 to 1850. Exactly what these ideas are it is necessary to discover,<sup>1</sup> for their contribution to the relationship of the primary doctrines one to another was never fully defined.

The relevance of these moral ideas, however, is implicit in Ruskin's criticism of different styles of painting, in his remarks upon idealism, and his historical estimates of various schools. The moral standards which were, in the theoretical analysis of imagination, obscured by the principles of formal order, reveal themselves one by one in specific criticism. The moral criteria, for example, behind his condemnation of Dutch painting or his nice discrimination among the ideals of Greek, Medieval and Renaissance art; the moral notions involved in his explanations of metaphor, imagery and religious imagination, or the moral judgments of abnormal or morbid art—these are the elements which illuminate the moral theory as it mingles with the esthetic.

In the third and fifth volumes of *Modern Painters* Ruskin is concerned with an inquiry "into the various Powers, Conditions, and Aims of mind involved in the conception or creation of pictures; in the choice of subject, and the mode and order of its history;—the choice of forms, and the modes of their arrangement." Part of

this analysis is theoretical, referring back to the discussion of imagination in his second volume; but part also concerns the moral assumptions implicit in all technical processes, still a third part discusses the conduct of imaginative idealism, both religious and profane, as it enters the province of art. These I have separated to avoid confusion. The first has been discussed in the preceding chapter, the technical criticism, in so far as it is relevant, is reviewed below after the discussion of the general attitudes called "Ideal."

Ruskin distinguishes several different sorts of artistic ideals. One he calls the "False Ideal," another the "Purist Ideal," a third the "Grotesque," and a fourth the "Naturalist Ideal." Nothing could better illustrate the shrewd criticism of Victorian days than his strictures upon the "false idealism" so common in the literature and art of his own period. Today we rather pride ourselves in our discovery that many Victorians remained optimistic by escaping from the painful facts of their own society through fanciful idealizations and legendary heroisms of ages gone.<sup>2</sup> Ruskin, strongly influenced by Carlyle at this time, sees just as clearly the unconscious motive of this escape, in his most prophetic manner he declares that all sensitive and thoughtful men should face the facts of the life about them. Having arrived at this conviction in his reflections upon art, Ruskin turned from precept to practice, he began his economic and political pamphlets in 1860.

The popular type of Victorian idealism in the eighteen fifties he describes in this fashion: "The pursuit, by the imagination, of beautiful and strange thoughts or subjects, to the exclusion of painful or common ones, is called among us, in these modern days, the pursuit of 'the ideal.'" What could more perfectly characterize Tennysonian<sup>3</sup> and Pre-Raphaelite medievalism? "The

trouble with it," Ruskin continues, "is that as an ideal it is hollow, it lacks the passion of belief. In art and in poetry of this sort there is decorative but false skill because in the conception of the idealized subject whether it be historical or merely fancifully religious, there is no penetrative sincerity." He turns, however, from mention of contemporaries to "the ancients," to the comparison of the thirteenth century nativity with a nativity by Francia or Perugino, but he does not lose the indirect reference to his own period

Men's proper business in this world, he declares, is first "to know themselves and the existing state of things they have to do with", secondly, "to be happy in themselves, and in the existing state of things, as far as either are marred and mendable." Instead, human creatures usually substitute three quite contradictory ways they remain "totally ignorant of themselves, and the existing state of things"; "they are miserable", and they "let themselves, and the existing state of things, alone (at least in the way of correction)." <sup>4</sup> Hence in their arts they grow into a "terror at all truth," into "a love of glosses, veils, and decorative lies of every sort," and they develop "a general readiness to take delight in everything past, future, far off, or somewhere else, rather than in things now, near and, here"; thus leading to satisfaction in pictures of "things as they are *not*."

Behind imagination, therefore, lies the moral obligation to understand ourselves and things about us, a passionate determination to face facts. There is a cowardly art, as well as a brave one; false idealism is not only dishonest, it is base.

In striking contrast to this type of ideal, but sometimes confused with it, is the idealism which results from honest but tender souled artists who are unwilling to contemplate the evil which necessarily occurs around

them. They are not blind, but their extreme purity betrays their weakness. Their art, however, is noble when it is instinctive, and its "effort is most successful when it is most naive and when the ignorance of the draughtsman is in some frank proportion to his innocence." Angelico is the sterling example on Ruskin's pages

The moral implication is that in so distorted a selection of material truths and sensual impressions the result is not base but narrow. In such art truths of a material kind are sacrificed to truths of spirit, the art is thus imperfect because incomplete. Yet the selection is good so far as it is instinctive, it is the true expression of a limited but genuine moral sense.

In the idealism called "Grotesque," Ruskin gathers a variety of fanciful, terrible and even cynical interpretations of life as represented in the subjects and forms of pictures. Almost all art of extreme romance, tales of wonder and of horror, satire threaded with the author's disappointed ideals, or the bitter jest of the cartoonist and illustrator make up the class. It is an interesting type, and not, I think, confusing in its heterogeneity. Ruskin's illustrations, however, are comparatively limited, they are largely from Durer, Holbein, Salvator and medieval grotesques. The noteworthy Hogarth is scarcely mentioned.

The principles implicit in true grotesque idealism are similar to those elsewhere. Spontaneity must exist; the imagination shall be instinctive; it is obvious to Ruskin that the rationality of academic grotesque is insincere and false. Truth of fact is still the essential criterion: "the honest imagination gains everything." The moral notions behind these esthetic distinctions are nevertheless patent in the very classification (interpolated from *Stones of Venice*). There is first the "art arising from healthful but irrational play of the imagination in times of rest."

Second, the "art arising from irregular and accidental contemplation of terrible things; or evil in general." Third, "art arising from the confusion of the imagination by the presence of truths which it cannot wholly grasp." All of these are good when handled by great men; but the second type, that art arising from the contemplation of terrible things, is very dangerous; it easily slips into false idealism of the most vicious kind.

But none of these types of the ideal reaches the highest capacity of man. Purism and grotesque are acceptable, yet the serious instinctive vitality of great artists "concerns itself simply with things as they ARE, and accepts in all of them, alike the evil and the good." This is *the* ideal for Ruskin: a logical extension of his naturalism, exhibiting in the broadest terms his realistic tendencies of mind. Because this style combines representative fact with imaginative ideals by the "organic unity" already described in the preceding chapter, it most fully illustrates the moral grounds of fine art; moral, moreover, as distinct from religious.

Great artists follow the conditions of their idealism with no self-conscious knowledge; for the work of great men, Ruskin has observed, is always instinctive: "the great men never know how or why they do things." There are no rules to be followed; there is no intellectual machinery. Great men "cannot comprehend the nature of rules": their imaginative invention, their very conception, because it is true, is instinctive discovery rather than an "invention." They are compelled by a desire to see facts, by a passionate sincerity which arises from their rightness of heart. Their spontaneity is completely unacademic, it is the natural result of their tremendous native energy.

"It may be asked," says Ruskin, as he continues to elucidate the moral sources of this ideal realism, "how



these unmanageable instincts are to be rendered practically serviceable in historical or poetical painting,—especially historical, in which given facts are to be represented?” Simply by the sense and self-control of the whole man, not by control of the particular fancy or vision. “He who habituates himself, in his daily life, to seek for the stern facts in whatever he hears or sees, will have these facts again brought before him by the involuntary imaginative power in their noblest associations, and he who seeks for frivolities and fallacies, will have frivolities and fallacies again presented to him in his dreams.” Thus, (and this is the center of the moral complex behind whatever the artistic process is seen to be) “a great idealist never can be egotistic”, he must lose sight and feeling of his own existence, always lost in the ideal reality, becoming a mere witness and mirror of truth, “passive in sight, passive in utterance.”

There should be no real confusion over the insistence upon spontaneity, vitality and passion on the one hand, and un-selfness and passivity on the other. The two groups of emotions are common to the ideals of all great moralists from Aristotle through Spinoza to the contemporary historian of current morality, Walter Lippmann. It is interesting to observe that the latter’s doctrine of “disinterestedness” and his moral philosophy of “humanism” are more than a little similar to the “humanism” which Ruskin professed to hold during his middle life as a moral creed. They are different from Ruskin’s only in the absence of theism and the presence of a modern biology, psychology and physics.

#### IDEAS OF RELATION PROPER

Idealism in art is thus examined and estimated in terms of the moral roots in the soul. The general principles

of discrimination worked out in the third volume appear again in the fifth, where a far more extended examination of subject matter in painting and landscape is undertaken. Here the content of pictures, the thoughts in them, are analyzed. These thoughts (what Ruskin had in the first volume called "Ideas of Relation") differ from esthetic ideas in that they are not to be appreciated or produced instinctively but "are the subjects of distinct intellectual perception and action" They are perhaps the most obvious signs of the ethical condition in the society which produced the artists, for the art itself is an index of the moral temper of any civilization.

Great periods of art are thus described and judged in terms of the attitude toward life which they express. One might say that Ruskin was sketching art's history entirely in terms of religious attitudes, for religious ideas blend with the moral notions in the descriptions of "expression, sentiment and character, whether in figures or landscapes" But his emphasis upon the moral basis rather than the religious in every estimate of importance is definitely clear

The attitude toward life reflected in Greek art is characterized not so much in terms of pagan religion, as in moral terms. Ruskin believed that Greek art had realized the ideal of perfect human form, but because of the Greek attitude toward woman and love it had failed in comparison with Christian art to realize any ideal of human spiritually. Thus, in "the *type* of beauty," Greek art was inferior, Ruskin thought, because it was dominated by sensualism. Nevertheless, the fineness of Greek art arises from the strength of its moral heroism as this compensates in the Greek character for the disillusionment in the benevolence of Greek gods and goddesses.

Greek tragedy, for example, in its fatalism and particularly in its "Nemesis," emphasizes "Sin" as a cause

of tragedy in a much more consistent manner, Ruskin thinks, than does Shakespeare. Moreover, it is not a little shocking to learn from Homer that men could not fully trust the benevolence of their own gods, the story of Hector's death by "the lance of Pallas" is a fine illustration of the fact that "Athena herself, our wisdom and our strength, may betray us: . . ." "The Lance of Pallas" becomes Ruskin's title for a chapter. Religion, therefore, cannot be considered as the source of what greatness there may be in Greek art, but moral courage can: "The ruling purpose of Greek poetry is the assertion of victory, by heroism, over fate, sin, and death." That is all; yet it is the noblest thought Greek art holds

Christian art, however, proceeds in its spiritual invention to the opposite extreme. It denies the splendor of animal nature which Greek art exploits, and though it contains an ideal intensely spiritual, this spirituality is narrowly pure. It is a fine example of what Ruskin describes as "Purist" idealism which rests on a fundamental weakness—in this case, on spiritual pride. In general, Ruskin observes, such extreme faith may be good, in the sense in which it destroys physical sensations of grief and fear; it may be good for a kind of happiness; but such happiness is achieved at too great "a sacrifice of abundant physical life." Ruskin is certain by 1860 that faith of this sort is subversive to the moral demands of great art; only limited forms of purist and grotesque idealism can result from it.

With painters of the Renaissance, Ruskin turns to consider landscape in particular; his summary of the characteristic thoughts of various schools, from that time down to his own, is drawn with landscape as its chief concern. Of Greek landscape we have no considerable information, so far as he is aware, and in Christian art landscape *per se* is insignificant because symbolical. But

Ruskin considers an interest in landscape to have begun in the Renaissance, and, in order to include Venetian painting, he pushes the aims of landscape to questionable boundaries.

The spirit of Florentine art, he felt, is ascetic; it is expectant of a better world to come; it is therefore antagonistic, in its moral implications, to the Greek temper. Thus when Greek cultural elements were forced upon it there was first confusion, then death. The Venetian temper, however, was less ascetic, and was capable of fusion with Greek influence. Its medieval inheritance changed the Greek aversion to suffering into a moderate tolerance of discontent with this world; but because of the belief in another world the "deep horror which vexed the souls of Æschylus" is nowhere to be found in Venetian art.

In other parts of Italy piety became abstract; in Venice it remained realistic, harmonized with the delight in the goods and joys of this world. There is considerable misunderstanding of the religious attitude of Venetians, especially by the English. It is thought to be both superficial and hypocritical; but such, Ruskin declares, is not the case. It is completely sincere, and its school of painters is "the last believing school of Italy."<sup>5</sup> Behind what appear to be ostentatious piety and religious pomp there lie the striking moral attributes of the Venetian character; the astonishing vitality displaying itself in the scale and the magnificence of the canvases, the passionately honest observation of both pleasant and unpleasant facts, the superb control evident in the compositions, and even, with the evidence of a reckless conscience, the delicate appreciation of human values. Hence, in their landscape backgrounds the Venetians achieved a particularly noble and at the same time realistic type which Ruskin calls "Heroic." It is characterized

by scenes from an imaginary world, frequently without architecture, by the presence of noble men, and by figure action which implies high emotion and spiritual powers.

The landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Ruskin's concern in that the painting of its finest masters, Claude and Poussin, illustrates definite moral and religious obliquities. This so-called "Classical" landscape implies no belief in a "supreme benevolent Being" and betrays a sense of spiritual destitution. The perception of ruin and decay in the existing world stimulates a felicitous but false fancy which fabricates the illusion that inevitable ruin is lovely and man's short life refined. Labor is banished from the scene; so too all signs of humiliation and degradation, for man, who has no assurance of dignity in another world, must attain dignity in this.

"The classical landscape, . . . is therefore the representative of perfectly trained and civilized human life, associated with perfect natural scenery and with *decorative* spiritual powers." As "good taste" and academic "restraint" have become vices in the art itself, so, in the moral background, their sources appear to be "the irreverent habit of judgment instead of (instinctive) admiration," and "the habit of restraint or self-government (instead of impulsive and limitless obedience)." Thus both Claude and Nicholas Poussin, who were men of sincerity of purpose and of great power (Poussin was the superior in the latter), lack earnestness, humility and the spontaneity which causes an artist to forget himself. Both men, in comparison with Titian, "the chief master of the Venetian school," lack sensitiveness and fineness of perception.

A third type of landscape, which Ruskin calls "Pastoral," is the product of men who possessed an inherent interest in natural truth, but men who, as in the cases of

Rubens and Cuyp respectively, have fallen prey to sensualism or rationalism. Rubens' work exhibits a powerful vitality, but the strange juncture of a cold, worldly temper with rectitude of principle and tranquil kindness of heart Cuyp, with his respect for rural life, his faithfulness to truths of nature, is nevertheless a slave of a lifeless academism Pastoral landscape, as a type, represents the attitude of a sensual and rationalistic decline, it concerns itself with peasant life and its daily work; no supernatural beings are ever vitally present in it, just as there is no elevated architecture, there is no evidence of high spiritual powers in the action of its figures, or nobility in the expression of its persons

The perfect type of landscape in Ruskin's opinion, therefore, is modern. He calls it "Contemplative," and Turner is of course the preeminent—almost the sole—master It would be vain for me to attempt to paraphrase Ruskin's discussion of the subject matter, the religious and moral ideas in Turner's work and their relation to his character. Instead of a few paragraphs these pages run to half a volume. But they include an interesting comparison with Giorgone, one of Ruskin's most admired Italians, in terms of the attitudes of these two geniuses toward the world around them and toward religious ideals

Giorgone is the type of conventional but noble religious idealist, and Turner the rare humanitarian naturalist. The spirit behind the "Contemplative" landscape is an interesting blend of a realistic attitude toward life with a humanist ideal; it arises from a profound religious sense, but is completely purged of supernatural and evangelical characteristics. Turner's particular emphasis is somewhat a parallel to Wordsworth's; there is the same bitter disillusionment in the life man leads within the great centers of his civilization and the same

passionate escape into the realities and transcendentalities of external nature

In Ruskin's somewhat pedantic phraseology, then, "Contemplative" landscape is said to be "directed principally to the observance of the powers of Nature, and the record of historical associations connected with landscape, illustrated by, or contrasted with, the existing state of human life. No supernatural being is visibly present. It admits of every variety of subject, and requires, in general, figure incident, but not of an exciting character. It was not developed completely until recent times. Its principal master is Turner." It is therefore obvious that Turner's work most perfectly illustrates "The Naturalist Ideal," the highest form of contemplative landscape.

There are two more types of landscape painting mentioned by Ruskin, embodying various forms of spurious attitudes toward life and toward art, and expressing distinct but partially false ideals. The first of these, the so-called "Picturesque," is really a degraded or undeveloped state of the contemplative type. It includes pictures meant to display the skill of the artist, or to give agreeable forms and colors and exhibit his fertility of composition irrespective of sentiment and subject matter. Examples are to be found among the Dutch, in the work of Canaletto, Guardi, Tempesta and many others, and among the majority of modern painters of Ruskin's day, and, I might add, our own. They illustrate various levels of sensualism, rationalistic abstraction, affectation and academism. Specifically the Academicians, Barry and Fuseli, the French classicists such as David, the English genre painters, and the then modern German religious school are cited as illustrations.

"Hybrid" landscape represents a spurious attitude by endeavoring to unite the irreconcilable sentiments of

two or more of the preceding classes. It is confused, unaccountable in taste, and often falls to incredible baseness. It is the height of vulgarity and is chiefly represented by Bernheim, Wouvermans and Teniers, who have "ice cold incapacity of understanding what a pleasure meant," and about "as much heart as a minnow." "The very mastery these men have over their business," Ruskin declares, "proceeds from their never really seeing the whole of anything. . . ." "All their life and work is the same sort of mystery to me as the mind of my dog when he rolls on carrion." Such painters are at the opposite pole of spiritual invention from Angelico.

Between them, however, there lie a few zealous artists whose work is typical of the hybrid landscape, but at the same time attains a "Grotesque Idealism" which has significance. Durer and Salvator, for instance, are superbly religious spirits. the latter utterly lost, but fighting evil to the death while still held by it; the former, concerned with evil but regarding it with greater detachment and control, and "not an altogether hopeless sadness." Examples of the work of these two men such as the *Fragilita* and the *Fortuna* of Salvator are compared with the *Knight and Death* and the *Melancholia* of Durer. Durer's sad but unsullied conquest over "Death, the tempter," and "Death, the destroyer," is contrasted with the shocking victory of death and ruin in Salvator over the spirit and work of man. The art of both men is representative of that attitude toward life, "which cannot conquer the evil, but remains at war with, or in captivity to it." Such, it will be recalled, was the explicit definition of one kind of the "Grotesque Ideal." <sup>6</sup>



## THE DOUBLE EMPHASIS ON NATURE AND MAN

Although I have risked confusing the reader by such detailed summary of Ruskin's classifications, it is done in the interest of illustrating how, year after year, throughout his criticism, he repeats the scheme of his esthetic in slightly varied form in succeeding criticisms. While discussing "Ideas of Relation" or "Invention Spiritual" in this fifth volume of *Modern Painters* he is repeating the classifications of idealism developed in the third volume. He alludes also, though indirectly, to the various moral roots of beauty which I have reviewed. His classification of landscape and his brief interpretation of the great schools of painting are nothing more than applications of the already defined postulates of his "Naturalism." All fit quite nicely like a picture puzzle, though jig-sawed to be sure by a rather impulsive and ostentatious hand.

There are, nevertheless, two important principles running through this criticism which are fundamental to an interpretation of Ruskin's moral philosophy of art. There is a double emphasis upon nature and man. The significance of landscape painting depends upon its connection with humanity. Its human values, its social or its spiritual implications constitute its interest. This is not the less certain, Ruskin says, "because, in many impressive pictures the link is slight or local." Indeed, his discussions of pictures by Turner often gratuitously interpolate a human interest. But without this interest, Ruskin had said that the naturalist or the landscape artist would be "nothing but a scientific mechanist." Just as in historical painting facts themselves are insignificant, so with landscape, it is the human sentiment, often implicitly expressed by the imagination of the artist, which constitutes the value.

Humanism and naturalism, therefore, appear to be

confused But Ruskin would clear away the obscurity by focussing attention upon the question of man's relation to nature. He pointed to two errors of emphasis which often mar the work of great artists Some art, he said, is concerned with man only, to the exclusion of nature, and some with the universe to the exclusion of man. Both are erroneous points of view. Man is the chief center of interest, the way to all spiritual import, to all value, but he must stand in due relation to creatures and to things. This is the second principle

The first principle is that art shall sensitively reveal the story of life, the second, that man, the chief source of the manifestations of Deity, shall be seen in a realistic relationship to the other parts of the universe, and to the various sides of his own nature "Every form of asceticism on one side, of sensualism on the other, is an isolation of his soul or of his body; the fixing his thoughts upon them alone, while every healthy state of nations and of individual minds consists in the unselfish presence of the human spirit everywhere, energizing over all things, speaking and living through all things" This is central to the theories of art and society, it is a fine example of the broadest of Ruskin's moral principles It is an obvious extension of two earlier notions that energy is the secret of health and wholesomeness, and that unselfishness is the root of active though philosophical disinterestedness

#### METAPHOR, IMAGERY, AND RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

With these fundamental principles now definite it is a simple matter to determine the way in which moral notions control what Ruskin regarded as the proper conduct of artistic or poetic metaphor, imagery and the extreme types of religious idealism. He had discovered that a

moral genius for perceiving the significance of facts was the center of the whole imaginative process. An inherited sensitivity assured intense feeling, which in turn produced a sincerity or a passion for truth that dominated the mind of the genuine poet or artist. So with the critic of imagery, truth of fact or appearance must become the standard of discrimination.

No metaphor consists in a simple or straightforward truth of appearance, but in truths of appearance complicated or removed a second time from actuality. Metaphor is the impression of a relationship between appearances, sometimes reaching from a concrete to an intangible but nevertheless visible substance. Hence, metaphor, if literally regarded, is a kind of legitimate fallacy.

Subjective or impressionistic as it is, the spirit of truth must guide within this accepted fallacy if it is to have artistic value. There is a great difference, for example, between the "wilful fallacy which involves no real expectation that it will be believed" and that other fallacy "caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us for the time more or less irrational." Coleridge's idea of

"The one red leaf, the last of its clan  
That dances as often as dance it can "

Ruskin considers a good example of this latter type. Here is given a false idea of a leaf, with the intention that it be believed and with the result that, for the moment, it is believed. This is vastly different from "the most perfect image possible" in Dante's description of spirits falling from the bank of Acheron "as dead leaves flutter from a bough." The principle is radically opposed to that of true metaphor as exemplified by Keats in the line from *Hyperion* about Elpenor's joining the group of shades in Hades: "How camest thou over the unfooted sea?" Such

an idea is true in respect to the sea and possesses no intent to deceive. Ruskin proceeds with many illustrations from a variety of poets all contributive to his discrimination for realistic imagery as against highly sentimental, morbid or idolatrous <sup>7</sup>

Imagery arises, he believes, from various states of mind. There are men who feel nothing and see truly; these are neither poets nor artists but scientists or in a lesser degree, common sense people. There are men who feel strongly and think weakly, and therefore see untruly, these are a second order of poets and artists. There are men like these in strength of feeling, but who see more clearly, and in whom influences stronger than themselves predominate, so that what they see is inconceivably above them; these are artists and poets of prophetic vision; they are very great. Whether or not they are to be considered greatest depended, in Ruskin's case, upon what his religious attitude happened at that particular time to be, for his emphasis, as I have said, shifted and reshifted as the years went by. Finally, there are men, who feel strongly and think strongly and therefore see truly; these are the first order of artists and poets. These are the "Naturalist Idealists."

In Oxford lectures Ruskin applies the same principle to religious idealism; he distinguishes false from true images by a kind of realistic honesty. The imagination of "a spiritual estate higher than that of men, and of spiritual creatures nobler than men . . .," ". . . the invention of material symbols which may lead us to contemplate the character and nature of gods, spirits, or abstract virtues and powers, without in the least implying the actual presence of such Beings among us, or even their possession, in reality, of the forms we attribute to them"—this is legitimate religious "invention."

Ruskin outlines in detail just how the great super-

human ideal can be properly signified in art, but without going into the byways of his discussion the moral principle may be explicitly stated. Idolatry consists in the artistic insinuation that the forms attributed to the imagined abstractions actually exist. It is thus basely deceptive, though often stupidly sincere on the part of the artist. Such literalness must never be confused, however, with artistic sincerity. Sincerity in art goes to the roots of things. Just as that type of poetic imagery which is caused by morbid or unhinged reason, and conceived with the intention of being believed is seriously false and in-artistic, so with idolatrous fantasy. Yet the existence of spirit or idealities is not to be denied, such a contention would be gross atheism. Ruskin resorts to casuistry. He gravely observes that "in all the noble actions of imagination in this kind, the distinction from idolatry consists, not in the denial of being, or presence, of the Spirit, but only in the due recognition of our human incapacity to conceive the one, or compel the other."<sup>8</sup>

But casuistry should not divert the reader from the main issue, which is that he believes the chief emphasis of religious art should be moral teaching in one or another form, not hallucinatory deception. Idols, though often beautiful in a superficial sense, are perversions of genuine poetic truth. In art they are often the best examples of how the pursuit of beauty may lead to the exclusion of truth. Such pursuit of beauty, he said, is nowhere more harmful than in religious art itself.<sup>9</sup>

A problem arises, however, concerning imaginative sincerity. How much, how hard, must the sincere artist believe, in order to attain the important sanction of "true imagination"? Ruskin's position would be, I think, if he were asked the question (and I argue from the whole esthetics rather than any one part) that the artist must believe as much and as hard as he can, in fact, he will

anyway, if he is real For the kind of religion he has, and the kind of mental balance, will depend upon factors not entirely within his control But if this is true, artists must inherit certain capacities, and they must be invariably influenced by social conditions Further, a man cannot then by the mere will to be an artist, become one Does Ruskin believe this? Does he think that an artist is born either with strong feeling and a penetrative mind, or without them? That artists, like gentlemen, are born not made? Until one has his views on the relation of style to character one cannot be sure.

NEFF, E *Life of Carlyle* N Y 1932

NICHOLSON, H *Tennyson* London 1923

WILLIAMS-ELLIS, A *The Exquisite Tragedy* N Y 1929

## CHAPTER V

### STYLE

#### THE THREEFOLD PURPOSE OF ART

THE twentieth century has obscured several things that appeared obvious to Victorians. In Ruskin's day it seemed axiomatic that paintings, sculptures and poems should interest people because the subject or idea expressed had some relevance to their lives. But the praise of art for art's sake rather than for the Lord's or society's or man's substituted, at the end of the century, the importance of plastic for moral qualities. Sentiments, ideas, facts were banned from the proper appreciation of art and for a long time critics have been trying to conceal their inevitable moral, ethical, religious or literary convictions. It has thus become irrelevant or vulgar or dull to comment upon the significance of anything so obvious as what an artist paints.

The revolution in criticism occurred, not because Ruskin overstated the social or humanistic values in art, but because the popular Victorian values were so limited. It was subject matter rather than the manner of artistic expression which Victorian taste had restricted and made dull. Ruskin himself went far beyond his public in his understanding of the manifold appeal of fine art, he was enough interested in the plastic and formal aspects of painting to write two large volumes concerning them. But he believed that technique and form were not significant for themselves; he tried to demonstrate the

meaning implicit in various types of composition, in line, space and color. His very effort to relate these artistic abstractions to the concerns of a sentient humanity led him to overemphasize moral ideas. The ostentation of his Victorian beliefs is largely the result of his eagerness to prove to people of merely sentimental vision that the "fineness" of art, the plastic power, the imaginative design, the sensual beauty, all flowed from the natural sources of human life.

In Ruskin's opinion, therefore, a critic could not be absolved from convictions concerning matters of current interest, but a perception and appreciation of the technical and "aesthetic" aspect of the fine arts was equally required of him. His ideal task was to explain and interpret the emotional mystery of the whole piece of art, of form as well as of content. Style, indeed, must be shown to reflect human nature, and plastic qualities to reveal the moral or emotional origin of their creation.

At the beginning of his essay Ruskin defined art as a sort of communication, a language. It was said to convey one or another kind of truth and these truths were analyzed into five different kinds of "Ideas." But just as the formal scheme of five ideas did not lend itself to the later extensions of his theory, so the term convey proved inadequate as a sign for Ruskin's actual meaning in reference to the function of art. In the first two volumes of *Modern Painters* art is primarily a mystical sermon about an idealized universe; in the third volume and after it is often understood as the healthy expression of emotional (moral) life. Two distinct definitions appear in the third volume: "'great' art is that which represents what is beautiful and good"; yet "greatness in art . . . is *the expression of the mind of a God-made great man.*"<sup>1</sup> The first accentuates the representation of beautiful and good facts, the second emphasizes the expression of person-



ality In any preference for one style as against another, for realistic as compared to highly imaginative, the contrary emphasis of these definitions becomes embarrassing Which capacity of art did Ruskin consider the proper one? Which style did he prefer?

The question is further complicated by the fact that the underlying division of artistic substance in Ruskin's later volumes is threefold rather than fivefold Art is still understood to convey truths of fact, but in Ruskin's analysis of beauty and imagination art may be seen to express ideals and sensual or qualitative impressions. The latter are frankly considered to be expressions of character; the relation of character to style, then, becomes a major theme in later essays and lectures

These difficulties arose because Ruskin made no formal re-division of categories for his theory and because he did not see clearly the important esthetic difference between "expression" and "communication" It is even doubtful if his theory would have allowed the separation which later esthetics has given these terms. In his earlier period it is the representative character of painting which appeals to him—though his glorification of Nature and God often carries him away with evangelical fervor into a half-expressionistic attitude In his middle years, society held his interest; the social function of art was to express the noble feelings of great personalities. Yet even here, art is still conceived as the conveyor of truth, moral and factual.

Thus, in both periods, art is a language the purpose of which is to communicate truth of appearance and the nature of which is an expression of "moral emotion" or personality. Ruskin perceived no real conflict. communication and expression were complementary ends God-made great men were, as artists, distinguished by keen perception of beautiful and good facts. Their intense,

natural feelings spontaneously selected noble subject matter; their health and sensitiveness assured the mastery of the technique of representation, their conscious devotion to the discipline of their craft itself could be viewed as an expression of their integrity of character<sup>2</sup>

The essence of the appreciative and the creative experiences of art was always, for Ruskin, emotional in the "highest" sense—a kind of philosophical emotion to which, as one may recall, he gave the name of "Contemplation" In a late work he reveals its salient emotional character by declaring that "Art is praise" Accompanying this chapter title to *The Laws of Fésole* runs the quotation from William Hunt, "Love what you study, study what you love" And this, as Ruskin made clear, was "all of *Modern Painters* in a nut shell"

The thing that distinguished great art from mean was, he said, neither "definable methods of handling," nor "styles of representation"—not even "choices of subject", it was "the nobleness of the end to which the effort of the painter is addressed." Such purpose was described in his own words as the desire "to present noble grounds for noble emotions"—the sources, in short, of great feeling Thus art is both representative and expressive. It represents the facts of natural appearance; it expresses the impressions which constitute beauty

In fulfilling this double purpose, however, the artist may be said to be accomplishing a third He is indirectly but inevitably expressing his own character in the actual performance of his art. His capacity for reverence, for sincerity, for the "fine" balance of emotional impulses is manifest in the technical perfection of his work. Technique itself is expressive

Noble emotions, therefore, constitute the essence of art Yet the grounds for these emotions rather than the emotions themselves constitute art's substance. The great

emotions are achieved indirectly through the perception and representation of realistic ideas. They, like the impressions of beauty and the expressions of personality, are the inevitable, God-given benefits of the instinctive attempt to see truly. They are in every sense *natural*.

Ruskin's irrational conviction that he was a "naturalist" is the key to his whole position on artistic and social matters of dispute. The naturalistic faith dictates even his theory of criticism. For "true criticism of art," he said, "never can consist in the mere application of rules, it can be just only when it is founded on quick sympathy with the innumerable instincts and changeful efforts of human nature, chastened and guided by unchanging love of all things that God has created to be beautiful, and pronounced to be good." The noble artist, said Ruskin, will paint his pictures "in love of the reality." Art, though expressive of emotional essences, must spring from the "rational and disciplined delight in the forms and laws of the Creation of which he" (man) "forms a part." Art is a kind of "praise" of real things. Love, even in great architecture, is the moving power, the life of the art. Like Carlyle's heroes, Ruskin's artist is motivated not by fantastic fancies, but by a love of the real world. But this love has very definite objects of devotion: it is, he says, a "triple love—for the art which you practise, the creation in which you move, and the creatures to whom you minister." <sup>3</sup>

#### THE PARADOX OF GREAT STYLE

A concern for the real therefore characterizes the style which Ruskin preferred. But he called this style naturalistic. "The naturalist ideal," he said, "has always in it to the full the power expressed by those two words. It is naturalist, because studied from nature, and ideal, be-

cause it is mentally arranged." A picture which realizes the naturalist ideal, he said further, is "taken straight from nature", it is "the plain narration of something the painter or writer saw" At times, he even presses this preference for literal representation beyond the limits of consistency "All second-rate artists will tell you," he says (and he might have included many twentieth century enthusiasts), "that the object of fine art is not resemblance, but some kind of abstraction more refined than reality Put that out of your heads at once The object of the great Resemblant Arts is, and always has been, to resemble, and to resemble as closely as possible." A realistic emphasis thus characterizes Ruskin's analysis of great style in all his writing on art <sup>4</sup>

But a part of the rational justification of naturalism was just that it offered a great deal more than literal realism Ruskin defended Turner's freedom in arranging natural objects to suit his taste wherever the compositional demands called for rearrangement. His love of twelfth century missals bore evidence to an appreciation of abstract decoration—distortion made sweet and holy. He tried, it is true, to defend Gothic sculpture and painting by an argument as near in line with realism as he could get it; but, at the same time, he pointed to the fact that Christian art attained the truest expression of "mental emotion." For argument's sake, this was said to be as real as the truths of bodily form which Greek art expressed; yet the confusion of two sorts of truth in such an argument is obvious.

Enough has been said to show the breadth and extension of this realistic principle; enough also to indicate the difficulties Ruskin had in relating it to the ideal. But the confusions which result when Ruskin seeks "the real" in paintings themselves or the ideal in what appear to be literal records of natural fact have not been considered

Such criticisms must appear to be nonsense unless they may be understood in terms of his triple faith, and it may not therefore be gratuitous to point again to the sources of ambiguity.

Ruskin is talking about what one ordinarily regards as two kinds of truth. truth of literal representation and truth of interpretation. He often talks about them as if they were one and the same thing. This he does because he believed that in great art they really were the same: half his esthetic theory is devoted to the exposition of the perceptive or appreciative aspect of art, and half to the inventive or imaginative. The essence of his doctrine of characteristic truth is that the perception of this truth involves the imagination, the essence of his doctrine of imagination is that its highest type is realistic. The validity of these doctrines may be judged from the foregoing chapters, here it is merely sufficient to recall them and to show very briefly how they apply to actual judgments of style, for instance to photographs.

Ruskin was very interested in photography, but he had no illusions about its artistic values. Photography, as Clive Bell has it, may have put the Pre-Raphaelites out of a job, but it held no destructive power for Ruskin's theories. A photograph, first of all, he says, is not literally true. it "either exaggerates shadows or loses detail in the lights", it misses "subtleties of natural effect" <sup>5</sup> Furthermore, a photograph lacks penetrative imagination, and thus is never truly "characteristic"; it is more the product of manufacture than human labor; it expresses no artist's personality—suggests no emotional conditions of contemplative delight <sup>6</sup> Art, as I have explained, must for Ruskin imply humility, and it is "just because a photograph can not condemn itself, that it is worthless."

The difference between photographic style in painting, and naturalistic, is that the latter achieves a "harmony"

constituted by formal laws "Those things which are necessary," says Ruskin, and those next "which are consistent" shall be selected, these determine the composition.

Now it must be clear that "necessary" and "consistent" are here terms with emotional reference; they have to do with the artist's feeling. The logic of "selection" is emotional, not intellectual, hence the difference between the picture and the photograph consists finally in the degree of emotional representation achieved by the artist, rather than in the degree of literal realism. Yet Ruskin said that the picture, not the photograph, was real. What did he mean?

He meant that the things selected were objects seen by a trained, though instinctive, perceptive faculty. This faculty accentuated certain things above others as it perceived them: it not only left things out of the whole possible field of vision, but reached below the superficial appearances to the underlying truths of each thing and of each in relation to another. It was the sight rather than the method of representing that was fundamental: "when we see keenly enough," he said, "there is very little difficulty in drawing what we see."

Perception, therefore, trained in keenness, though instinctive in its preference, must be said to determine the form of objects in a picture. Because things are never by a real artist seen in isolation, this perception also determines the relationships of objects—in short the contrasts of their beauty and ugliness. It is, as one might say, esthetic sight. From this it logically follows that perception controls the actual drawing of indistinctness and mystery. Such effects are not the result of blurred seeing, but of exact sight. It also follows that perception controls the largeness of scale and the delicacy and minuteness of the degrees of finish—in fact, the very quality of the

painting is implicit in the nature of the perception of the things painted

Now all these qualities are stylistic—ordinarily thought to depend upon other than perceptive acts. Ruskin, however, in justifying realistic style pushed “perception” into the imaginative or contemplative act itself. He also believed that the exact rendering of these formal perceptions is the source of realistic power. It is not, however, the exact rendering but the *exact seeing* which the superficial imitator, the vulgar artist, can never achieve, neither he nor the camera has trained perception. For even design appeared to Ruskin to be a kind of supersight. It is often called invention, but there is, he said, no new thing created. Invention, in his own words, is discovery. “Penetrative Imagination” is fundamental to it.

Now all this is an extension of the doctrine of characteristic truth which served, as I have said, the double function of distinguishing mere copy from “true representation” and of pulling the imaginative ideal into realistic style. It is the argument from theological “naturalism,” for the possible—nay necessary—faithful representation of “heaven in a wild flower.” It is the argument which his theory of imagination furnished him, in his own words it is briefly stated: “The question is, therefore, how the art which represents things simply as they are, can be called ideal at all?—accepting the weakness, faults, and wrongnesses in all things that it sees, it so places and harmonizes them that they form a noble whole, in which the imperfection of each several part is not only harmless, but absolutely essential and yet in which whatever is good in each several part shall be completely displayed.”

Such is the argument by which Ruskin was able to justify the elaborate realism of the Pre-Raphaelites; it was also the argument by which a dramatic, imaginative

picture like *Tintoret's Adoration of the Magi* could be said to be realistic. Tintoret's disposition of solid form, his color, even his contrasts were found by Ruskin to be both literally resemblant and imaginatively harmonious, for "the work of great masters," he said, "looks always as if it had been gathered straight from nature" <sup>7</sup>

I have tried to smooth out the ambiguities, to make Ruskin's realistic argument as reasonable as possible, because it very often appears to be so. He actually convinces one for the moment of the realism of a Turner or a Tintoret. But to think like this, one must be some sort of idealist—one must have so great faith that fact and feeling remain always unified. The ordinary critic finds that the worlds of fact and feeling will somehow insist upon remaining apart for all theoretical attempts to identify them; in any single piece of art he tends to discriminate between a representative and an imaginative style by the preponderance of fact symbols over those of feeling. Ruskin, however, especially in his criticism of landscape, finds artistic symbols of fact also the symbols of great emotional truth and it is never quite clear whether the perceptive or the inventive elements most excite his admiration. His actual criticism often devours the theory which justifies it. <sup>8</sup>

Ruskin may thus make extravagant claims for the importance of literal representation—for the Real, but it remains beyond a doubt that the naturalistic principles arise from an emotional concern for the romance, the poetry, the ideal in the natural world. A faithfulness to the facts of appearance is seldom alien to romantic literature. It was especially common to the literary romantics of the early nineteenth century. Scott, for example, is a sterling example, and Scott was one of Ruskin's lasting enthusiasms. The very phrase "historical topography" which Ruskin applies to Turner's representation of natu-



ral scenery referred, in the first place, to the scenes of the Waverley novels.

With the observation of detail in the scenes of the Waverley novels Ruskin found also a steady current of moral sentiment which delighted him because it seemed to him an evidence of true contemplation. Now moral value, as I have tried to show, Ruskin conceived in terms of happiness. Its form was sometimes a code of health with extraordinary realistic observation to support it, but it was at other times a code of piety based upon a very unrealistic denial of natural facts. "Whatever is good for life is beautiful," he said, with a very naturalistic gesture; but he could say this only because beauty had been discovered to reveal moral types. Thus, in art, when he says that nature must be accepted, the bad with the good, one finds that the subject matter has been carefully selected. Subjects were to "involve wide interests and profound passions", they were to be rendered, the good with the bad, but the good was to be *completely* displayed.

The purpose of art, then, is to convey truly the artistic vision. It is possible to find noble grounds for noble emotions in things as they are because an instinctive love of true expression, nature and man directs perception itself. Ruskin may well argue that perception regulates the fancy and governs the true ideal, for artistic vision is colored by a dream lens, very often ground to the angles of a moral code. Ruskin's own vision indeed is often blended with truths whose source is not "the appearance of natural objects" but a traditional ideology or a new humanitarianism. For a dozen years or more it is the romantic mystery of nature which thrills him in the Waverley descriptions and the Turnerian landscapes; later, after 1856, it is a human theme which appears to give nature significance, he decries "the popular doctrine

of the picturesque" The artist, therefore, is said to see truly when he follows anyone of the three focuses of artistic vision. when he purifies his practice, when he glorifies nature, or when he represents mankind with sympathy Great style appears to rest upon one or upon a compound of these three conditions Through all Ruskin's work after 1850 these paradoxical postulates appear. They lead the way from esthetics to political economy<sup>9</sup> and from political economy to economic experiment and reform.

#### DIFFICULTIES WITH SKILL

It may appear that I am approaching Ruskin's theories of style the wrong way round, from the moral rather than from the technical point of view. But I have done this intentionally, as it is more consistent with the characteristic tendency of Ruskin's theory. The study of the science of mere form in art appeared to him a false and hollow affair "It is the branch of art-philosophy to which the word 'aesthetics' should be strictly limited, being the inquiry into the nature of things that in themselves are pleasant to the human senses or instincts, though they represent nothing, and serve for nothing, their only service *being* their pleasantness."

Form for form's sake had no place in Ruskin's theory of artistic value, nor had perfection for the abstracted pleasure in its "finish" Skill became significant as it conveyed a human significance and suggested the fuller connotation of artistic power In the first volume of *Modern Painters* he had noted the "great delight" to be found in perceiving "the mental or bodily powers employed in a work of art"; in discovering the evidence of labor, strength or dexterity But he had also observed that the delight in the perception of such dexterity is easily con-

fused with an improper pleasure. it is very often a precarious element in the judgment of any work of art

We gain the proper conception of skill,<sup>10</sup> he says, "when by a perfect knowledge of the difficulty to be overcome, and the means employed, we form a right estimate of the faculties exerted," and, "when, without possessing such intimate knowledge, we are impressed by a sensation of power in visible action." Now when these two modes agree in the result, when the sensation is verified by the estimate, then the "greatest possible ideas of power" are gained. But this occurs only in the appreciation of the work of a few great artists. Generally speaking, the sensation and the estimate do not agree. The mere sensation of power must be regarded with suspicion for it may arise from imperfect art as easily as from perfect.

The figure of *Twilight* in the Medici Chapel is a good example of a work by a great artist which stimulates a false sense of skill. "The half hewn limbs" give a distinct sensation of power, but an estimate of the difficulty and means employed leads to the conclusion that the victory of the artist over the difficulties is not complete: the realization of form is, as one might say, still going on. It is a trick rather than a powerfully expressed conception. A similar sensation, Ruskin thinks, arises from line cartoons and from the dashing but obvious strokes in portraits by such as Franz Hals. This is because the partial success attained with slight effort produces a greater sensation of power than the perfect success attained with greater proportional effort in another kind of work, for instance a portrait by Raphael. Sensation may be said always to be in proportion to the apparent inadequacy of the means to the end. Every touch in the process of creating a piece of art contributes individually less as the work approaches perfection.<sup>11</sup>

Ruskin suggests that many people, ignorant of these

facts, misjudge the value of inadequate work; they trust a mere sensation which they have derived from the effect of inadequate means. They prefer their sensation to "the mental perception" of power: "the handling" of Rubens, for example, to that of Raphael. One may thus generalize as follows: "Those pictures attain the highest ideas of power which attain the most perfect end with the slightest possible means." Whether the work be useful or beautiful is a question irrelevant to this special judgment: "Excellence depends on the difficulty alone."

Pedantic as this elaboration appears, the shrewdness of certain observations should be obvious. To note that apparent inadequacy of the means may produce sham effects of power, to observe that incompleteness, roughness, "dash" may also give the impressions of power (a fact probably suggested to Ruskin by Reynolds); to argue that both inadequacy and "dash" are apt to be superficial effects not necessarily related to superior craftsmanship in the fullest sense—these are all reflections of critical value. But Ruskin's explanation is unconvincing. One may regard as plausible what he calls "the intellectual estimate of difficulties"; one may also admit that such a judgment might concern the excellence of workmanship, but how this estimate is related psychologically (if it is) to the sensation of power, upon which sensual information the estimate is itself made (for there is no other but sensual data involved) is left completely in the dark.

Such argument is typical of Ruskin's early ventures into theory: the observations of the effects are clear, the explanation remains an interpolated hypothesis without test or application, leading generally to confusion. He himself, as I have said, considered the "Ideas of Power" the least satisfactorily explained of all his formal categories. What he is trying to say, nevertheless, appears

very simple and sensible. If I am not mistaken, he is arguing for an ordinary, conscious criticism on the part of any beholder of the skill involved in a "striking" work of art. He has learned that uncritical impressions often lie; and in the case of skill, the lie involves an estimate of character, for artistic difficulties are also moral difficulties.

Ruskin's desire to show sensation untrustworthy is thus characteristic of a moral dualism. When there were great emotions involved in the art work—or even proper platitudes—Ruskin was only too inclined to regard the execution as skillful. He read into Turner sketches, for example, many noble emotions that Turner himself may never have intended. And Ruskin did this to justify his own delight in the *sensational* technique of Turner's sketching. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, on the contrary, he asserts that in a "progressive" art there is always "a certain neglect or contempt of refinement in execution" or at least, "a subordination of execution to conception." The technical shortcomings of medieval carvings were on this basis condoned, while his delight in the sentimental appeal of these sculptures urged him to praise their artistic conception.

It is thus seldom clear in his own criticism whether Ruskin is making an "intellectual judgment" of the difficulties met by the artist, or whether he is following his limited moral code in approving some sentiment or religious thought. Very often, too, it is neither of these things which stirs his admiration, but a temperamental predilection for dramatic features of almost any sort. Again and again one may observe his love of drama, as in Tintoret, his susceptibility to brilliant color, as in Turner and the early Italians, his enthusiasm for religious or allegorical themes, as in the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites.

One may thus accept certain inconsistencies as typical of his opinions on skill. His consideration of sketching<sup>12</sup> brought forward serious difficulties. When rude execution is not the result of imperfect feeling, as it always is in the experimental studies for large pictures, but merely the result of limited means, and limited time for thought, as in rapid noting of scenes or ideas, then, said Ruskin, a very noble and justified pleasure may be derived from the work. Truly powerful sketches are always those of "impatient swift noting"; they are sure, certain, and often mighty in their manner in spite of their limitations and rudeness. Turner, for example, never recorded anything to be modified later, he instantly modified as he drew. So, Ruskin claimed, did Tintoret, who almost never "sketched." It is therefore the sureness of feeling, the swift, intuitive vision that controls skill and manifests true power.

But such a contention contradicts Ruskin's earlier opinions concerning skill. To be consistent with the analysis of skill in volume one of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin would have to present some certain means of distinguishing sure or perfect feeling from imperfect and he would have to deny any intellectual clues in the work itself. He would have to resort to a preposterous intellectual estimate, not of difficulties, but of feeling itself. His theory of beauty and imagination, however, asserts that the appreciation of quality is not intellectual. So when skill is made dependent on feeling he is lost. How is one to distinguish between uncertain feeling and uncertain thought; between emotional experiment and impatient mental record? Judgment, in this crisis, is reduced quickly enough to taste and taste to an instinctive feeling for character. But there is even greater evidence of inconsistency in Ruskin's preferences for diverse and discrepant moral traits.

Taste thus remains the test of excellence or skill, provided that one realizes the moral nature of all imaginative and representative art, and the moral nature of appreciation itself. In Ruskin's opinion a vulgar man could not truly express facts or fine feelings, nor could he appreciate them. Granting this, there is only one logical generalization concerning skill. Power is the technical aspect of the moral artist. A keen estimate of skill, therefore, is a perception of character; an appreciation of skill is an appreciation of personality.

The honest, healthy, sensitive man is always, in any craft, the most skilful, all notions of "power" which involve cunning, deception, cleverness are erroneous. Perfectness in rendering of artistic intentions must never be confused with polish, or smoothness, or the false imitation of objects often called "finish." "Right finish is simply the full rendering of the intended impression." But impression is no mere intellectual derivative; it is conditioned by the very roots of character. Even such technical details as the manipulation of color, light, and shade are fundamentally expressive of moral taste.<sup>13</sup>

"Believe me, gentlemen," said Ruskin to his students in 1870, "good workmanship consists in continence and common sense, more than in frantic expatiation of mechanical ingenuity." And it was the cultivation of these virtues to a high degree that Ruskin believed the right teaching of art could accomplish. His own preferences, as we shall see, were quite consistent when common sense dominated their indulgence and their defense. But like those of other Victorians they were hopelessly at odds when intellectual theorizing covered up the private excess of romantic pleasure, or confused the "health" of an emotional appreciation with an assumed "holiness."

## PERFECTION IS PERSONAL

Ruskin's early analysis of skill failed to offer an objective standard of measurement which was consistent with his general theory of style. But his fundamental argument is not seriously disturbed. Later volumes of *Modern Painters*, the *Oxford Lectures* and the technical essays, *The Elements of Drawing* and *The Laws of Fésole*, all bear witness to his firm conviction that the roots of style were not intellectual but instinctive and moral. The formal laws of style—of invention, of composition, even of color—are related to the sentiments of naturalism on the one hand and, on the other, to the moral patterns of "noble" personality. Yet Ruskin did not believe that the actual employment of compositional laws could be measured in the same way as the representation of natural objects. "Drawing," he said, "may be taught by tutors: but Design only by Heaven." <sup>14</sup>

Nothing could better illustrate the emotional generality of the principles of composition than their application to architecture. In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* Ruskin discusses seven modes of spirit or seven attitudes of mind which are the very conditions of great architectural style. There is first "the spirit which offers for such work precious things, simply because they are precious; not as being necessary to the building, but as an offering, surrendering, and sacrifice of what is to ourselves desirable." This is the "Lamp of Sacrifice"; it is obviously an adaptation of one emotional aspect of contemplation. There follow the "Lamps" of "Truth," "Beauty" and "Power," which are nothing other than extensions of the esthetic naturalism so fully discussed above. There must, for example, be a desire for "Truth" in the hearts of the workmen, of carving the real thing, not the thing fancied; there must be the emotional sincerity, the expression of



the "Power" of the individual mind which, in great instances of imagination, achieves "the sublimity" of architecture. Such are the salient attitudes; they are clearly the general statements of the emotional states described in the theoretical discussions of "Truth," "Beauty" and "Imagination "

Two more general modes of spirit complete the catalogue. They are curious applications of two detailed virtues discovered in the theoretical analysis of natural beauty, but in this reference to architecture, they are called the "Lamps" of "Life" and of "Obedience" The one is simply the requirement that vitality be present or, as Ruskin phrases it, that the various parts of great architecture depend "upon the vivid expression of the intellectual life which has been concerned in their production." The other is the demand that architecture be "obedient" or instinctively sensitive to the laws of nature; that it suffer no "liberties" in the ordinary sense but a "Law of Liberty." Both ideas are extensions respectively of Ruskin's theory of "Purity," and his theory of "Moderation" or "self restrained liberty" <sup>15</sup> The moral or emotional basis of his architectural theory of style is apparent on almost every page of *The Seven Lamps* The general principles of sculptural style, moreover, are similar, for Ruskin tended to identify the two arts.

Composition in general, as Ruskin pointed out in 1859 in *The Elements of Drawing*, is "literally and simply, putting several things together, so as to make *one* thing out of them; the nature and goodness of which they all have a share in producing." To this there is an analogy in "the Providential government of the world," as explained in natural theology. Thus, "it is the essence of composition that everything should be in a determined place, perform an intended part, and act, in that part,

advantageously for everything that is connected with it" This principle is applied in *The Seven Lamps* to the composition of architecture and sculpture as well as painting So all composition has its roots in the morality of human behavior or in the types of moral beauty discovered in the idealized world that Ruskin beheld They flow from the two sources: "Nature" and "Personality."

Principles of composition thus fall into two groups. what I might call the unity group and the individuality group. There are principles of unity: the laws of "Help," "Co-operation," "Harmony," "Moderation" or such names as "Principalty," "Repetition," "Continuity," "Consistency"—the nomenclature depending in each case on the reference to the particular art, whether sculpture, architecture, landscape, religious art or merely art in general. There are also principles of individual liberty. laws of "Infinity," "Mystery," "Sincerity," "Of the Greatest" and "Of the Least" and many technical qualities turned into principles such as "Contrast," "Curvature," "Variation," "Completeness," etc.

In matters of color, agreeableness depends neither upon imitation nor structure, but upon "some inherent pleasantness," likened to pleasantness "of taste to the tongue," or the sweetness of musical harmony which depends on a physical principle, or the sculptural feeling for roundness of surface Color sense, like all other natural tastes, depends "on health and right balance of mind." Its distinguished use is always rooted in gaiety of heart, innocence and common sense. It is thus directly expressive of personality. But Ruskin would not leave it unrelated to the orders of beauty in the natural world He thus chooses his palette entirely from the colors of natural objects. from clouds, from precious stones and from minerals.

"Well composed," then, does not mean, for Ruskin,

composed according to rule, but according to moral individuality. The moral attitude of the individual artist is the very heart of his great style: "Every great work stands alone." The vice of academism is just that it destroys this individuality, for at the center of individuality is artistic sincerity. "Well composed" means "composed as only the man who did it could have done it, composed as no other picture is, or was, or ever can be again." Standards of artistic excellence must ultimately be discovered in the roots of personality: "all the technical qualities," declares Ruskin, "by which greatness of treatment is known, such as reserve in colour, tranquillity and largeness of line, and refusal of unnecessary objects of interest are, when they are real, the exponents of an habitually noble temper of mind, never the observances of a precept supposed to be useful." <sup>16</sup> In so far as art is the product of a personality it is therefore moral even in its technical qualities, for these are the individual expression of the personality and personality is conceived, by Ruskin, in moral terms.

Now in so far as the act of composing can be called "creative" it involves an intention—a purpose. A deed is creative—in fact a deed—only when it is what was intended. "People without purpose produce immense and sorrowful effect in the world", they are just those who are most uncreative or destructive. The foreseeing of effect, the carrying out of an intention, cannot, however, be ultimately achieved "except by a person who knows, and in his deed obeys, the laws of the universe, and its Maker." The "mere fitting and adjustment of material is nothing; is watch-making." Artistic intention is "the passionate harmony of Apollo and the Muses." For in so far as he achieves purpose in accordance with the laws of the universe, in so far as he really "creates" anything, the artist will be seen to "put life into it." This is why

creative ability is so often regarded as divine, for it is naturally, hence divinely, moral

Ruskin has joined in this instance the notions of artistic and ethical vitality. His contention that the artist must follow a purpose has possible reference to a social theory as well as the obvious reference to the artistic "motive" upon which all arrangement centers.

But the effort to draw in the Christian deity is a good example of how Ruskin is trying to keep the moral basis of these artistic (and later social) principles in line with Christian belief. He could never tolerate license. His explicit moral source is the *Phaedo*; but the above discussion is deliberate "Naturalistic" interpretation, an interpolation of Christian beliefs into Plato.<sup>17</sup>

In the true composition, then, as in personal living, there is a moral basis for organic unity: "The Least" is as important as "The Greatest." Neither worship of littleness nor that of greatness may exist for itself. Unbalanced admiration is characteristic of bad art (the art, by the way, of the late eighteenth century academicians). But in truly fine art the significance of every part, every line, every form, is to be discovered in its relation to the leading emotional purpose, technically called the "motive." Thus besides the "Law of Help" this organic necessity produces what Ruskin calls the "Law of the Least" and "The Rule of the Greatest," which form the titles of separate chapters in his last volume of *Modern Painters*.

Perfection in art, therefore, means harmony; and harmony in a highly complicated sense, involving on the one hand the notion of organic unity (a purely formal principle) and on the other the perfect control of the self (a moral idea). "Nothing shall be contentious" for there shall be a perfect representation of "all true authority and freedom:—authority which defines and directs the action of benevolent law; and freedom which consists in

deep and soft consent of individual helpfulness." The suggestion here of Goethe's ideal in *Wilhelm Meister* is strong but there is little probability that Goethe influenced Ruskin.<sup>18</sup> What Ruskin means by "Authority," "Freedom" and "individual helpfulness" is to be found in Plato's *Republic* read with a Christian bias, and, strangest of all possible sources, in John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty*.<sup>19</sup>

The moral notions implied in the composition of pictures are thus adaptations of those demonstrated in the analysis of beauty. But they are referred to the character of the artist. They are based upon ideals of perfect human nature and society. Great art is truly representative of nature, man and the society from which it springs, for the roots of its imaginative beauty are "co-operation," "energy," "purpose" and "harmony."

#### POWER IN GREAT STYLE

All these virtues are manifestations of "power" in art, especially as they evidence the wholeness and perfection of the artist's personality. Sometimes Ruskin views them as a separate class of ideas which correspond to the group called "Ideas of Power" in his first formal scheme; at other times, they are merely the detailed elements of "Great Style." The classifications of "power" and "skill" were never satisfactorily fitted into his esthetic, partly because he realized as time went on that art expressed personality besides conveying truth, and partly, too, because the very idea of "power" grew to include much more than it had first seemed to.<sup>20</sup>

Power in its fullest sense is not just skill—nor merely a "mode of imitating nature"; it is a mode of expressing personality; it is the imaginative capacity of artistic expression. In other words, if Ruskin proceeded to discuss

the evidence of power, he would find himself discussing all kinds of abstract invention, formal principles of style, and whatever features of art or architecture could be abstracted as signs of "the arrangement and government received from the human mind." Power, then, is this instinctive formal expression carried to a high degree, its manifestation in line, mass, shade, color, proportion, etc., is the actual expression of noble emotion. Power,<sup>21</sup> in the largest sense, is the subjective aspect of great imaginative style.

The famous chapter of the third Volume of *Modern Painters*, "Of the True Nature of Greatness of Style," is a concise statement of all the preceding principles, both of subject matter and of form, in the creation of pictures. The distinction between "Great" and "Mean" art is not primarily a matter of handling or technique, but of nobility. This consists in presenting through the technique "noble grounds for noble emotions." The noble emotions were said to be love, veneration, admiration and joy. To gain these the great artist must love beauty and hate vice; his art must possess four chief characteristics.

There must be "a sincere and wise choice of noble subjects," which "involves all the conditions of right moral choice." There must be a love of beauty "that introduces in the conception of its subject as much as is possible, consistently with truth." This "involves all conditions of right admiration." There must be sincerity, which means that the art "includes the largest possible quantity of Truth in the most perfect possible harmony." This involves "all strength of sense, evenness of judgment, and honesty of purpose." Finally, there must be imaginative invention, which Ruskin considered to be the imaginative statement of the significance of facts (facts in themselves mean nothing). This involves all the true principles of technique, "all swiftness of invention, and

accuracy of historical memory . ” Finally, Ruskin ostentatiously postulates the moral basis of style “The sum,” he says, “of all these powers is the sum of the human soul ”

In Reynolds Ruskin found the illustration of an artist in whom the motives of power, truth, and beauty were in fairest balance Ruskin says explicitly·

“He rejoices in showing you his skill, and those of you who succeed in learning what painters’ work really is, will one day rejoice also, even to laughter—that highest laughter which springs of pure delight, in watching the fortitude and the fire of a hand which strikes forth its will upon the canvas as easily as the wind strikes it on the sea He rejoices in all abstract beauty and rhythm and melody of design, he will never give you a color that is not lovely, nor a shade that is unnecessary, nor a line that is ungraceful But all his power and all his invention are held by him subordinate,—and the most obediently because of their nobleness—to his true leading purpose of setting before you such likeness of the living presence of an English gentleman or an English lady, as shall be worthy of being looked upon forever ”

Reynolds’ work was thus a perfect representation of great character, his “great style” shone with “nobility ”

BELL, C *Landmarks in Nineteenth Century Painting* N Y 1927.

NEFF, E *Carlyle and Mill* 2d edit N Y 1926

ROE, F W *The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin* N Y 1921.

The “Introductions” to the Library Edition of Ruskin’s Works, particularly to *Modern Painters III, Elements of Drawing* and *Laws of Fésole*.

## CHAPTER VI

### ESTHETIC RESPECTABILITY

#### GENTILITY

STYLE, according to Ruskin, has a moral foundation. But if style is based on character and great style on noble character it would seem reasonable to inquire what noble character is. In spite of his constant reliance upon the term *noble* Ruskin leaves it without definition till the last volume of *Modern Painters*. In the first volume "objects worthy of contemplation," which were to be represented truly, were found to consist in those which were "beautiful" and "noble," but no attempt was made to give specifically the characteristics of nobility. This was also the case when, in the second and third volumes, it was found that great art could be appreciated and produced only by rare and cultivated minds. Such minds possessed "noble natures"; they were prophets of the good life, like Carlyle's heroes they did not appear often upon this earth<sup>1</sup> But the outlines of their nobility were never clearly stated.

Now what Ruskin means by nobility is most perfectly revealed by his disquisition on the nature of vulgarity. Nobility, it seems, is practically synonymous with gentlemanliness, the quality to which the Victorian bourgeoisie universally aspired and, according to Ruskin, too seldom attained. The influence of Ruskin's English environment is nowhere more clearly marked than in these opinions, but his effort to free the ideal of gentility from its popu-



lar economic and social shackles is an equally strong indication of his Scotch earnestness. The zeal of his Scotch forebears overwhelms him. He tries to turn "gentility" into a description of the ideal character.

Important as this ideal is to the moral theory which underlies the esthetic, there is no real question of his developing one first and then deriving the other from it. His ideas on art are not mere derivatives of the notion of gentility, but the criteria of great art qualify Ruskin's concept of gentleness, and the standards of gentility again affect his conceptions of great art. The two idealizations are parallel in detail, biographically they interact and clarify one another in the gradual development of Ruskin's intellectual position.

Gentlemanliness is composed of those qualities which are usually the evidence of high breeding, vulgarity of those qualities usually characteristic of ill breeding. Vulgar qualities, "it becomes every person's duty to subdue . . . according to his power." But gentlemanliness cannot be cultivated. it is actually (or as we would say now, biologically) bred.

Yet Ruskin perceived two gross, popular errors in the then current understanding of the term gentleman. The so-called higher classes, he says, being generally of purer race than the "lower," have retained the true idea ("a man of pure race") "but they are afraid to speak it out, and equivocate about it in public." This proceeds from their desire to give a false meaning to the term; "that of a man living in idleness on other people's labour, with which idea the term has nothing to do." On the other hand, the lower classes deny vigorously and with reason the notion that a gentleman means an idler, but they "have nevertheless got little of the good they otherwise might, from the truth, because, with it, they wanted to hold a falsehood,—namely, that race was of no conse-

quence It being precisely of as much consequence in man as it is in any other animal."

But, continues Ruskin in his most hortatory manner, "the lower orders, and all orders, have to learn that every vicious habit and chronic disease communicates itself by descent, and that by purity of birth the entire system of the human body and soul may be gradually elevated, or, by recklessness of birth, degraded, until there shall be as much difference between the well-bred and ill-bred human creature (whatever pains be taken with their education) as between a wolf-hound and the vilest mongrel cur And the knowledge of this great fact ought to regulate the education <sup>2</sup> of our youth, and the entire conduct of the nation "

This is of course an astounding conclusion for one who believed that both the appreciation and creation of technical excellence in the arts could be cultivated in some degree. It is a very difficult position for one to hold who had declared that the only principle of cultivation of sense impressions, or good taste, was trial and error, who had, in fact, professed an optimism that, over a long period of experiment, our preferences would "come right in the end." Furthermore, in matters of education Ruskin did not consistently uphold the importance of caste The very fact that his theory of education is anti-vocational, based on moral discipline, transgresses the belief in breeding as the source of gentility. Moreover, he declares that laborers may "understand"—even "share"—the feelings of a gentleman. This, if it means anything, contradicts his belief in "caste"; it forces one to suspect that Ruskin's egregious emphasis upon gentility is to be explained by his own unconscious social inferiority. For to support the applicability of his theory of moral education Ruskin publicly humiliates himself by exaggerating his own lack of gentility <sup>3</sup> while emphasizing the impor-

tance of his moral training But he maintains, nevertheless, his contention that gentlemen are born and not made

There is little evidence for believing that Ruskin when he wrote the chapter on vulgarity in 1859 had as yet read *The Origin of Species*, just published, but there is a great deal of evidence arguing for the influence of Carlyle The latter's theory of the biological nobility of the hero is similar to Ruskin's explanation of the traits of the gentleman and the "genius" <sup>4</sup> It is true that Newman, in his *Idea of a University*, extended the ideal of the gentleman to education. But his virtues of moderation, calmness and wisdom also include "freedom" in its intellectualized character, they are unlike Ruskin's notions in that they are strictly Aristotelian. The difference between Newman and Ruskin on education becomes particularly marked when, as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter, the moral guide of conscience is considered Ruskin's educational aims are less intellectual and far more frankly "moral" than those of the academically sophisticated Cardinal

The characteristics of the gentleman, in Ruskin's theory, all proceed from the rudimentary notion of finely bred nature; both physical and mental structure afford the greatest possible capacity of delicate and accurate sensation. This, Ruskin thinks, is quite compatible with "heroic bodily strength and mental firmness; in fact heroic strength is not conceivable without such delicacy." Nobility, therefore, lies not in a man's rightness of precept but in his sensitiveness and natural fineness "Courage, so far as it is a sign of race, is peculiarly the mark of a gentleman or a lady"; yet "timidity is not vulgar, if it be a characteristic of race or fineness of make", a "fawn is not vulgar in being timid, nor a crocodile 'gentle' because courageous." Kindness and mercy always

indicate, to be sure, "more or less fineness of make in the mind", but a truer sign of breeding than mere kindness is "*sympathy*."

A vulgar man, Ruskin explains, "may often be kind in a hard way, on principle, because he thinks he ought to be, whereas, a highly bred man, even when cruel, will be cruel in a softer way, understanding and feeling what he inflicts, and pitying his victim." Here, like Carlyle, Ruskin must resort to casuistry to explain the apparent vices of pride and cruelty which the heroic gentleman betrays. The quantity of sympathy in a gentleman, he says, can never be judged by its "outward expression" because the typical characteristic of "apparent reserve" may conceal his true feeling. If he has both self-knowledge and sympathy for the limitations of others, he can be completely candid only to those of his own kind. Candor thus appears to be a privilege. But sensibility is constant; the true gentleman's pity for the humanity below him is (to put it lightly) appalling "your true gentleman" (as distinct from your clown) "has walked in pity all day long, the tears have never been out of his eyes!" Though this paragon says little, his feelings prompt him to do something when (Ruskin is careful to add) there is something to be done!

The true gentleman needs the characteristic of self-command only in so far as he falls short of his ideal, because he feels rightly, or should (if he is what he is) on all occasions. His conduct in regard to truthfulness is more or less modeled upon Ruskin's conception of Greek honesty. The gentleman carries out "a desire for truthfulness" in so far as it is possible. The "absolute disdain of all lying belongs rather to Christian chivalry than to mere high-breeding." The gentleman has the Greek sense of honor which, according to Ruskin, held the lie hateful "that did not know itself and feared to confess itself,"

while the "true lie"—the gentleman's in this case—"knew itself and confessed itself for such, was ready to take the full responsibility for what it did." The Poet Laureate had alluded to this subtle distinction: "A lie," says Tennyson, "which is half a truth is ever the worst of lies!"

"Vulgarity" consists, therefore, in the negative of gentility, that is, in the want of sensibility. "To feel unwisely and to be unable to restrain the expression of unwise feeling, is vulgarity." A chief characteristic of the vulgar is their "undue regard for appearances." The vulgarity does not rest in the pretense nor in the affectation of manner, it lies "in the real (not assumed) scrupulousness". in the failure to understand rightly and instinctively "the relations of importance between oneself and others" <sup>5</sup> There is a fine parallel to this in art: the accuracy in vile things, or the dullard mechanics of the stupid artist are preeminently vulgar.

The habitual trait of the vulgar in human relationships is "cunning." In its fullest form, this is the lie which the Greeks hated; it is accompanied by a sense of superiority and is "associated with a small and dull conceit and with an absolute want of sympathy or affection." "The degree in which political subtlety in men such as Richelieu, Machiavelli, or Metternich, will efface the gentleman, depends on the selfishness of political purpose to which the cunning is directed, and on the base delight taken in its use" Ruskin, it will be noted, does not mention among this questionable gentry Carlyle's hero, Frederick of Prussia!

Vulgarity therefore "consists in a deadness of the heart and body, resulting from prolonged, and especially from inherited conditions of 'degeneracy,' or literally 'un-racing.'" It is not to be associated with cruelty or rage but with the inability to feel or conceive with instinctive

nobility. "It is merely one of the forms of Death" <sup>6</sup> Gentility, on the contrary, is *the* form of "Intense Humanity"

These paragraphs considerably illuminate the curious "humanism" which Ruskin professed not only in religious matters but, as a disciple of Carlyle, in his economic discourses. The virtues of true gentility as he conceives them appear to be an elaboration of the characteristics of Carlyle's Hero, who was the good man raised to an ideal power. According to Carlyle he possessed sincerity, and the passion for truth; he had the "seeing eye" which penetrated shams, he was a creative force, "a source of order!" <sup>7</sup> These traits, especially the last, Ruskin carries to the very roots of his economic concepts of wealth and social cooperation. Yet Carlyle's heroes often betrayed egotism, cruelty and a curious indifference to the plight of those for whom they should, according to Ruskin, have been plunged in sympathy. But the magic of vitality transformed vices into virtues for Ruskin as easily as it did for the prophet of Ecclefechan.

Personally, Ruskin's sympathy for men was immense and *Time and Tide* bears witness to his insistence upon the initial freedom of opportunity. Yet the fact remains that he looked upon the environmental miseries of the industrial poor and the "ignoble" indifference of the aristocracy, concluding, so far as the canons of respectability went, that the poor were hopelessly ill-bred while the aristocracy suffered from a lax moral education. He seems to have felt some traditional distinction between this fallen aristocracy and the newer and more successful capitalists; for the inhumanity of the captains of industry appeared to him a perfect example of vicious breeding, which he observed was encouraged in the most repulsive forms among the ranks of their shopworkers. He

would have laughed had anyone accused him of making gentlemen out of the members of the Workingmen's College. He was trying, he said, merely to make carpenters into better carpenters. In their craft and in their morality they might be improved, but their gentility remained in the hands of the Lord.

This romantic idealization of nobility or "gentleness" permeates Ruskin's criticism of art. It precludes that the "False Ideal" shall be esteemed vulgar like the stupid forms of "grotesque", it assumes that the "Naturalist Ideal" shall follow, in art dealing with the human figure, the sensitive sympathy of the gentleman. The characteristics of the noble man: the imaginative energy, the sincerity, the love of truth, the superb coordination of body with mental aims, the perfect cooperation and harmony of all parts, all these are the gifts, in no great degree to be acquired, of a highly specialized, highly bred creature, and that creature is the gentleman-artist! "Only a great man can choose, conceive or compose." "But to become a great artist it is only necessary to be noble."

In the light of this, the vague "moral emotion" which theoretically aids the "perception of truth" acquires explicit significance. Style is the reflection of emotional conditions and great style of high character. "All art is great, and good, and true, only so far as it is distinctively the work of *manhood* in its entire and highest sense."<sup>8</sup> Even the "methods of observation and abstraction are essential habits of" an artist's "thought, conditions of his being."<sup>9</sup> Thus the great schools of art are reflections of the highest moral characteristics of the societies which produced them. "You may read," says Ruskin, "the characters of men and of nations in their art, as in a mirror."

## PIETY AND ESTHETIC GOODNESS

This central juncture of moral with what is now called esthetic theory forces upon the speculative reader an important group of questions. Ruskin saw them clearly, stated them and tried, as best he could, to answer them in the light of his whole theory of art. If beauty is essentially moral (even in the broad, non-ethical sense of morality) and "Great Style," at its source, is nobility of character, it may be asked, how beauty "is ever found in the works of impious men, and how it is possible for such to desire or conceive it?" Ruskin's answers are simple and to the point. He observes that many forms of typical beauty may be "aesthetically" or sensually pursued and that many questionable characters have an instinctive but licentious taste for this beauty because their inherent nobility has been abused.

Furthermore, the moral implications in "typical" beauty (in line, light and color) may not be realized even by the artist; as, for example, in the later paintings of the Renaissance, and in the works of the great French painters of classical landscape. In such art, though the degree of sensuous beauty is often high, the truth of fact and the evidence of spiritual power are wanting; for moral implications and real truth can only be reached by a contemplative imagination which impious men do not possess. Yet Ruskin adds the wise qualification that some kinds of art may have values of a limited sort and still be worth seeing, just as some personalities may justify themselves by a very few virtues in spite of predominant vice. No "great" art, however, can arise from men who are "false, insensitive, or ignoble." Piety, in short, is not fundamental to art, but instinctive morality is.

Another question, a corollary of the first, arises to plague the theorist. This of all questions for the young



Ruskin was the most difficult to answer. "How does it happen that men in high state of moral culture are often insensible to the influence of material beauty: and insist feebly upon it as an instrument of soul culture?"

Pious men, Ruskin counters, are often perverted by their very piety. The devil has been long known to reach into the heart of the religious. Through selfish interest in their salvation, through spiritual pride and a consequent scorn for the human and *natural* evidences of deity, good men often blind themselves. They turn perhaps to rational investigation of vice and virtue and deny the very instincts for morality which are given them. Ruskin's is a canny answer to the bigoted puritan of his own period "The whole subject of brute creation," said Dr Thomas Arnold, "is to me one of such painful mystery, that I dare not approach it." This would have seemed to Ruskin a downright refusal to recognize the beneficent (I might say naturalist's) deity, "whose presence makes the earth itself a heaven."<sup>10</sup>

The expression of abnormal emotions in art Ruskin discussed with equal candor. Horror, he thought, is a certain form of awe; it arises from our instinctive perceptions of visible forms of decay, of the violation of natural law, and of the violation of laws of our human nature. It is sometimes little more than mere disgust at things painfully offensive. But by these offensive things Ruskin does not mean the mere abrogations of fashion or superficial propriety, but the profound indifference to the natural morality which is universal.

But what a cloak this universal morality is for prejudice! Here are great opportunities for Ruskin to exploit all the ascetic and narrowly puritanical opinions justified by his doctrine of "moral law." All art which exploits false ideas of wealth, which is sensual or morbid, which plays with the notions of vice or degradation, the insane

manifestations of despair or the fantasies of religious doom,<sup>11</sup> horrifies him and is condemned. Yet the salient principles in his long and scattered accounts are few and very simple; though fascinated by morbidity and considerably afraid of it, Ruskin's observations upon it were particularly rich in common sense.

Sensitive and thoughtful people, he notes, are originally (or as we should now say, congenitally) capable of a pleasure in terrible objects which thoughtless or dull people are incapable of. Artists, therefore, or poets, are particularly open to the appeal of such things. If they are uninfluenced by moral principles and yield to their love of excitement, they may continue to indulge in such sensations at wrong times, "to the general disturbance of their intellect and the degradation of their character."<sup>12</sup> Capable people may in this way sink far below persons of less capacity. All art of morbid character is the representation of the interest of artists who have in this way fallen short of a true life.

These answers appear to meet the carefully phrased questions with technical adequacy. The discussion occurs in the second volume of *Modern Painters* and does not therefore present as fully as later writings Ruskin's prevailing attitude toward piety and its relation to morals, for at this time he had himself fallen prey to the very forces he is analyzing. Much of his detailed criticism of pictures illustrates the blindness into which a particular creed, a particular complex of religious associations could throw an otherwise free mind. His prejudices against the nude,<sup>13</sup> for example, are notorious cases, as well as his exaggeration of the idealism of the Pre-Raphaelites, and other schools of religious and idealistic painting. Though maturity obliterated many religious preferences, early prejudices continued to warp his judgment. Because he had found early nineteenth century French painting

irreligious and immoral he failed to see in Impressionism the technical (and moral) principles which he had with amazing clearness prophesied in his first defense of Turner, and reasserted in his mature volume called *The Elements of Drawing*.

#### A HUMANISTIC ART EXCLUDES PIETY

By 1850 Ruskin had met Carlyle and had launched into the composition of *The Stones of Venice*. Social issues, rather than those of piety, were presenting difficulties to the critic of architecture, religion gradually took a secondary place in his discussions of art. Morals, however, remained a primary concern. It was inevitable, therefore, that his readers should have been somewhat confused, for it was not quite clear what he meant by religion. Not until 1873, in the ninth *Oxford Lecture*, now one of the series called *Val D' Arno*, did Ruskin make his views explicit.<sup>14</sup> For nearly twenty years, it seems, he had been considering religion, as Carlyle had considered it, actually dependent upon moral attitude. But his own words are finally explicit.

"You do not say that one man is of one piety and another of another but you do, that one man is of one religion and another of another

"The religion of any man is thus properly to be interpreted, as the feeling which binds him, irrationally, to the fulfilment of his duties, or acceptance of beliefs, peculiar to a certain company of which he forms a member, as distinct from the rest of the world,—which binds him irrationally, I say;—by a feeling at all events apart from reason, and often superior to it, such as that which brings back the bee to its hive, and the bird to her nest."

Now this instinct is always regarded by Ruskin as similar to the instinct in man to follow the laws of natural

morality. Truly a disciple of Carlyle, Ruskin came to feel that religion need not at all rest upon gratitude for favors to come, nor morality upon what Shaw has called "the sugar pill doctrine." A religious life became for him synonymous with an active, useful, dutiful life; a life in which the focus of interest was upon man and man's world, "without any regard for the next." In this sense Ruskin became a humanist.

So much for religion in a broad sense, but what about piety, and the religious inspiration for fine art through the ages? On this subject Ruskin developed very explicit opinions. In a fragment posthumously published he noted that people capable of the intense experience of horror and terror often devote themselves to a life of specifically religious sentiment or exertion. Religion may in many instances appear to protect them in that it interferes with the carnal sensations and often "will utterly quench delight in terror, as well as the more sensual forms of beauty." Is not religion, then, universally beneficial, an aid to the oversensitive artist? In his answer Ruskin did not hedge: religious sentiment and exertion, he said, also check the pursuit of knowledge in various directions, and, though they quiet fears, leave finely tempered people incapable of much that others can do and feel. Religion tends to narrow the broad perception of truth. So it is with artists. If, however, these sensitive people should devote themselves to active, healthy and honest lives, without any specific religious principles, their sense of terror will occupy "a duly subordinate place, among other natural and human sensations: and as they advance in life, generally diminish, and yield much of its place to a pure love of facts and of beauty."

Religious "visions" then, are "always the sign of some mental limitation or derangement." Their values have been greatly exaggerated in reference to art. The highest

results in art are, so far as Ruskin has been able to observe, obtained by men in whom vision was subordinated to "deliberate design." Art is the work of good, rather than distinctly religious men

For a time, especially during the writing of the second volume of *Modern Painters*, Ruskin held that although vision or spiritual power might not direct the artist, it did exalt him: it stimulated and purified his power. "But now," he writes in 1870, "I hold religion to be detrimental to the artist." He points to the fact that artists in general have not themselves chosen religious subjects; these have been dictated for them. In this way ecclesiastical authority has limited invention and perverted belief. What skill and beauty there was came not through a religion or a church but through the love of earth, and thence through religion in a very indirect sense.

Finally, in respect to how far art has furthered or advanced religious creeds, Ruskin thinks that the false type of religious imagination has often advanced the literalism of a certain creed, but that the effect has been harmful to the individual and to the society involved. If, however, the type of imagination in this art is merely representative or (as I have called it) realistic; if the picture merely represents the religious idea, personage or superhuman ideal, without the implication of belief in its actual existence unjustified by other evidence—then, the art is healthful and beneficial; then it is morally imaginative.

But these opinions, however satisfactory in regard to the relation between religion and art, are generalized into capitals, they say little about the artist as a real person. They are thought out largely from the appreciative point of view. A reader might well believe, especially after the attenuated abstractions which I have felt necessary to give, that Ruskin had no real notion of what a painter's life or a painter's personality were like; that he dealt in

realms of shadow and lived among moral generalities as unreal as they were absurd. But Ruskin was too human for this—he was himself far too hopelessly caught in the coils “of human bondage.” No careful reading of *Præterita*, with its superb pathos and conceit packing the lines on almost every page, could for a minute admit such a view, nor indeed could a mere cursory glance at the biographical facts of his life. But lest there should remain any doubt whatever on this score there are the following remarkable observations entitled *On A Painter's Profession as Ending Irreligiously*. I should like to quote them entire but the demands of space forbid.

“Most people,” Ruskin begins, in reviewing a variety of religious faiths, which rise out of “world pain,” “are brought to God by Gratitude; not for what He has given, but for what He has promised.” But of this sort of religion the painter has none and can have none. He will by his very nature be so healthy, vigorous, active and sensitive that he will never confuse his own fatigue or vexation with the gloomy state of the universe nor expect supernatural help. He needs no such consolation because he is, wherever you find him, an incorrigibly contented fellow. Everything he has or that exists about him is of constant service to him.

“How can you make such a man as this Discontented with the world? There are three colours in it—he wants no fourth—finds three quite as much as he can manage. . . But the world is a passing, dreamy, visionary state of things! Do you then want them to be always the same—how could one vary one's pictures if that were so? But people lose their beauty and get old in the world! Then they have long beards, nothing can be more picturesque. . . But how thin and ugly their grief makes them—don't you mourn for the departure of the bloom of youth? Not at all—I like painting thin people as well as fat ones—one can see their skulls better. But how

wicked people are in the world' is it not dreadful to see such wickedness? Not at all—it varies the expression of their faces

But you don't want to mend the world then? No—I don't see that it wants mending—unless, perhaps, it might be better with fewer fogs in it; but I don't know, I daresay fogs are all our own fault for not draining better, at all events—the best you can do for me at present is to stand out of the light, and let me go on painting

“What can be done with such a man? How are you to make him care about future things? Even if misfortunes fall upon him, such as would make other people religious, he will not seek for consolation in Heaven. He will seek it in his painting-room. So long as he can paint, nothing will crush him. Nothing short of blindness—nothing, that is, but his ceasing to be a painter, will enable him to contemplate futurity ”

So much for “dark religion”—but neither is the life of happy religion in the popular sense possible to him:

“As far as we have seen, all happy religious life has consisted in the fulfilment of direct social duty—in pure and calm domestic relations—in active charity, or in simply useful occupations, trades, husbandry, such as leave the mind free to dwell on matters connected with the spiritual life. You may have religious shepherds, labourers, farmers, merchants, shopmen, manufacturers—and Religious painters, so far as they make themselves manufacturers—so far as they remain painters—no ”

For the painter spends half his time “simply seeking his own pleasure, and that in the main, a sensual pleasure. I don't mean a degrading one, but a bodily not a spiritual pleasure ” His realistic acceptance of the ugly and the beautiful, of the evil and the good in the world about him, which is necessary to his art, is subversive to religion. The demands of his craft, the tremendous exigencies of bodily and mental labors actually prohibit what is ordi-

narily understood to be "spiritual life" "This continual mechanical toil, this fixed physical aim, occupies his intellect and energy at every spare moment—blunts his sorrows, restrains his enthusiasms, limits his speculations, takes away all common chances of his being affected by the feelings or imaginations which lead other men to religion" He is thus driven from religion by the nature of his toil and prevented from it by the conditions of his own sensual satisfactions in the beauty of the world that is his to paint Religion in the usual personal sense is incompatible with art.

But painters (and Ruskin is talking about the "best" painters) may have a religious life in a very rare, indirect and yet real sense, although few would be able to attain it This is a kind of realist's religion; one certainly not held by Ruskin for more than a part of his life, but one which at this period of writing he admired<sup>15</sup> and, I believe, tried to realize. "There is a . . . form of religious life conceivable," he says, "in which this world may be enjoyed and laboured in without any regard to the Next That is to say, in which a man may consider it his duty to concern himself at present about the place which God has for the present put him in; being quite ready—if God should ever see good to put him into another place, to concern himself then about that" Yet even here, an active following of social or human interest, any intense preoccupation with the concerns irrelevant to his artistic pursuit—concerns of the world in which God has placed him—would, it seems to Ruskin, be incompatible with the painter's life and devotion. In art alone the painter must achieve whatever spirituality he can get. However moral this may be, it cannot be considered in any proper sense of the term "pious."

This, by the way, is the real answer to the question first considered in *Modern Painters* II, "Why can im-



pious men create beauty?" For, in most cases, the term impious does not mean what Ruskin means by "bad," "vulgar" or "insensitive", but more nearly and literally what he means by "profane" in contrast to sacred. The reader, moreover, must guard against imputing to artists themselves any such conscious questions, theories or justifications as these dicta might lead one to infer. Ruskin knew only too well the verbal inarticulacy of the man. Turner, he had no illusions, after Turner's bluff silence upon his own youthful and theoretical eulogies and after his own worries with young Pre-Raphaelites, about a painter's indifference to theories. Yet, as I have said before, all this breadth of "noble" sense must be taken as representative only of a part of Ruskin's views, part indeed, of that personality, which has been appreciated largely in terms of its other, darker, pious and more genuinely "vulgar" half.

#### THE SEEDS OF ESTHETIC CONTENTION

In conclusion, then, imagination and morals have been shown to be sprouting from the same roots. "Representation" itself was found to possess the inevitable accompaniment of sincerity or truth of feeling. "Style" in the final analysis was seen to be little more than the index of personality—the focus of the artist's sincerity, the health of his imagination.

In this position one discovers the expanded form of Winckelmann's insistent idea that craftsmanship, or style, carries with it, inevitably and irremediably, the marks of a human individual. To discuss style or form in art, as Hogarth did, with no recognition of its tremendous implications, Ruskin believed was to miss its greatest significance for human beings. He kept insisting, whenever he touched the matter, that style could not be con-

sidered a mere intellectual invention, that it always implied a true declaration of facts or sincere expression of feelings. Style was, in other words, inextricably a part of the truth, whether the content of that truth was, as in landscape, the facts of land or sea or sky, or, as in an historical or religious painting, the emotions or passions of men.<sup>16</sup>

Such a belief underlies all the eloquence of the famous chapter "On Greatness in Style", it accounts logically for his contention that the style of the art of any period is an index of the moral characteristics of the people in that period. His conception of style thus led Ruskin directly from theories of art to social theories; it is one source of his social criticism, it is the link between art and economics.

Understood, then, in the light of the theories of representative truth, or imaginative sincerity, there is no confusion of moral with esthetic in this matter of imagination and style. The famous catch phrases which have been ridiculed appear preposterous only when isolated from their theoretical context. "No false person can paint", "Men who might have been good painters are not . . . for they are not (in the broad human and ethical sense) good"; "Good art is the Formative energy of a good spirit"—these are all expressions of Ruskin's very logical position in reference to the problems of artistic truth, beauty and style. Behind them lies Ruskin's desire to establish a certain common basis for the truths of fact, impression and feeling—the important elements in the complicated experience called art.

In so far as a lie in paint can throw off a moral hint of the personality of the painter, the artist could be considered false. "Great Masters," said Ruskin, "permit themselves in awkwardness, they will permit themselves in ugliness; but they will never permit themselves in use-

lessness or in unveracity" The full "relation of truth—its perfectness—that which makes it wholesome truth" is precisely what true representation and vital imagination depended upon, "and the value of every work of art," Ruskin believed, "is exactly in the ratio of the quantity of humanity which has been put into it" <sup>17</sup> But the "false person" is the ungentle man—the man lacking in humanity As an artist he is inadequate because his feelings are dulled, insensitive, he can neither represent facts truly, nor grasp their poetic significance, he can achieve, therefore, no free expression of personality "A thing may be, in the abstract, well or ill done mechanically, but well or ill done artistically, only as the subject of character in energy." <sup>18</sup>

In this way Ruskin joined the ideal artist with the gentleman. Victorian respectability itself was lifted to the rank of creative "Nobility", a sanction for art was assured But beyond the popular appeal of his theory three theoretical points are significant. He had argued that the perception of truth in fine art was "natural" and spontaneous, that beauty consisted in an impression of sensual qualities, formally unified and morally symbolic, that the mysterious abstraction style was the reflection of personality in the fullest sense, of the physical capacity, the moral or emotional control, the spiritual attitude of the artist Each of these contentions has relevance to various aspects of "modern art" and to twentieth century speculations concerning them

These opinions advance the scope and concentrate the issues of English esthetics. With the exception of Alison's analysis of the importance of association of ideas in the experience of beauty Ruskin's views are more relevant to modern esthetics than any of his English predecessors Hogarth's theory of the line of elegance is too conscious it breaks down when it is actually tested by the facts in

the process of making pictures or statues or poems. The rational connoisseurs of the eighteenth century—Du Fresnoy, Du Piles, Crousaz, Richardson and even Reynolds—in spite of the fact that they all painted pictures, had in their theoretical explanations no place for the mysterious and highly spontaneous emotional factors in imaginative conception. Hume and Burke came the nearest to a genuine recognition of these factors, but neither of these writers made any definite application of his psychological principles to art or to the process of creating art. The theories of the Academicians, who held that didactic instruction was the imaginative aim of historical painting, are superficial when compared with the analysis of moral-imaginative purpose in Ruskin. In Wordsworth there are suggestive passages, and in Coleridge's reflections upon the writing of poetry there is the beginning of a theoretical explanation for the creative side of experience. Yet Wordsworth's theories remain too simply or sentimentally mystical and Coleridge's too complicatedly metaphysical for any constructive application to the fine arts. But in Ruskin's work lie the seeds of twentieth century contention.

In his theory the operation of intuitive powers which perceive truth and beauty have been shown to depend upon the proper functioning of the faculty under which they fall—the moral faculty or the soul. Thus, as in the exposition of the theory of beauty, the achievement of great art rests finally upon the acuteness of moral emotion, upon the full operation of the moral faculty, upon the health of the soul. The ultimate case for his theory of art, in this particular of imagination, is thrown back upon what is meant by "Moral Emotion" itself and what Ruskin's notion of morality involves. And these meanings are relevant to later theorists because they threw overboard the whole psychological tradition of the "Moral

Faculty," and with it the Victorian belief in the fundamental morality of art.

I have tried to explain some of the foibles of moral personality and have indicated a few of the obvious absurdities in Ruskin's moral creed. Too often for the reasonableness of his whole theory Ruskin has been shown to be justifying the creative impulse in art on the basis of mere respectability. Reasonableness, indeed, could be granted only when one perceives the currents of moral and ethical conflict in Ruskin's period itself. Only by an attempt at historical summary is it possible to make sense of what twentieth century generations have called nonsense. Only through comparison with other contemporaries may one estimate fairly the real extent of Ruskin's moral caprice.

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## PART III

### “HIGH SERIOUSNESS”





## CHAPTER I

### THE MORAL CONFLICT

#### COMPLEX INFLUENCES

THE design of Ruskin's esthetics is, as I have shown, conditioned very largely by the nature of his moral philosophy, but this moral matter itself is far less systematic than the esthetic propositions that apply to the fine arts. It is a most unsubstantial mixture of the sands of doctrine and the cement of faith. It is interesting mainly because it is so representative of the period in which Ruskin lived, so characteristic of the material from which Victorian temples of the spirit were built. Changes in religious faith and variety in moral concepts in the years from 1830 to 1880 are legion, contradiction and inconsistency were, as always, the result of powerful traditions struggling for supremacy not only in the attitude of groups or schools, but within the behavior and thought of individuals.

The "high seriousness" toward God, nature and moral law, characteristic of Ruskin's period, rises from three general traditions which are roughly parallel to the esthetic traditions reviewed at the beginning of this essay. For instance, the tradition of moral fear with its roots in Pauline doctrine dominated the minds not only of Evangelicals but of many prominent "Noetics," such as Thomas Arnold and Richard Whately. To a greater or less degree it exploited the sense of sin, objectified evil, and rejoiced in affliction; the theology behind it was

not very different from that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and definitely in opposition to the rational, mechanistic theology of the eighteenth, of which Paley was the chief exponent

This later mechanistic theology, however, had encouraged a morality which was during Ruskin's life active and aggressive. With its roots in the philosophy of Locke, Hume and Sir Isaac Newton, it opposed the magical objectifying of sin and exploited the so-called facts of human desire. Jeremy Bentham, its greatest exponent, had erected a theory of behavior based upon a human impulse rather than super-human dreams—a moral arithmetic of pain and pleasure following the principle of utility. This was the ethical basis underlying the new economics of Malthus, Ricardo, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill, the active opponent of Carlyle and, later, of Ruskin. The methods of argument followed by these men had greater semblance of scientific procedure than the methods of the naturalist divines, the broad churchmen or even the later prophets. The Utilitarians, though they proceeded from assumptions that were mere doctrinal axioms, nevertheless continued a more exact and comprehensive scrutiny of social behavior. They paid more heed to negative instances that might not fit their thesis.

But a third tradition complicated the half-realized moral attitudes of many earnest thinkers. This was a romantic attempt to escape the sharp conflict between puritanism and utilitarianism, or the latent impulses of fear and aggression that motivated these moralities. The form of escape varied but was seldom difficult, the early Victorian elevated his mind to intellectual abstractions in three conventional ways: by a revived Platonism, by the intricacies of German idealism, or by the romantic humanism of Goethe. Platonism particularly was encour-

aged by the teachings of the broad churchmen in the universities. By 1840 German metaphysics had won considerable attention in England. Soon, Kingsley and Maurice were inspired by Coleridge's *Idea of Church and State* to develop an elementary Christian Socialism, and Kingsley was also attracted by another group of intellectuals including Lewes, Froude, Sterling, and the energetic friend of Jane Carlyle, Geraldine Jewsbury, who espoused, through Carlyle's influence, many of the ideals of Goethe. Indeed, the very attention which Carlyle provoked may be partly accounted for by the already aroused interest in German philosophy and literature.

The Oxford Tractarians, on the other hand, stimulated by an Aristotelian but no less idealistic revival, had plunged into medieval theology and submitted to the ethical conventions of the two great bodies of the Catholic church. Certain powerful, isolated figures, such as Patmore and Mansell, the one significant for his religious mysticism and the other for his popular metaphysics, stand singularly separate from any group, but discover as certainly as others their own escape from Calvin on the right and Bentham on the left.

All these writers from the profound Coleridge to the superficial Bulwer and Disraeli foster the most curious combinations of moral idealism, combinations of natural theology from the eighteenth century Butler or Rousseau<sup>1</sup> with suggestions from the metaphysics of Kant and Fichte, or Goethe's theories of moral education, all piled on top of a certain academic familiarity with the Platonic *Dialogues*, the Nichomachean *Ethics* and the literary didacticism of Horace. And of all these English idealisms there was none more variously compounded than that of Carlyle's most powerful disciple Ruskin. For Ruskin, even before he read Carlyle, was very definitely caught and whirled about by all these general

traditions. His special interest in art theory followed striking parallels to the conflicts in ethical dogma.

Ruskin's early environment fixed his emotional reactions in the patterns of a Pauline Christian. His intellectual development, however, grew more and more toward a recognition of the facts of human nature. Locke was put in his way, then Burke, he took a fancy to scientific analysis even before he went to college, and admired Turner for what he believed was the truest possible representation of the actual appearance of natural scenery. On the other hand, he was by no means immune to the idealistic appeal of Wordsworth; and his father had stimulated him to appreciate the romantic appeal of Byron, though little of the latter's cynicism seems to have touched him. Ruskin read the natural theology of Hooker, as I have explained, and had been trained under the new naturalists Buckland and Sedgwick. But he also read Reynolds and Opie and Fuseli in art theory, and leaned strongly toward a vague assurance that idealism was compatible with "truth." His first study of Italian painting, moreover, was deeply influenced by Rio's discussion of the intensely religious content of early paintings.

Even by 1846 the twenty-seven year old critic had absorbed the highly contradictory assumptions of three traditional ways of thought; his writings are thus the very expression of traditional conflicts. His temperament had prevented his becoming an eclectic, for he could not choose nicely; he could seldom resolve contradictions. He was far too impatient even to see them. This incapacity was heightened by the fact that after 1850 he became tangled in emotional misfortunes, inflamed by a prophetic vanity, and consumed with admiration for the brilliant but similarly explosive Carlyle.

The only description, therefore, of Ruskin's moral

theories that may come near historical fact is one which attempts to line up the oppositions, tangled and unresolved as they are. For convenience I have arranged these moral contraries in three principal groups which correspond roughly with the puritanical, the utilitarian and the idealistic traditions just suggested. The genesis and development of Ruskin's opinions is rather the interest of the biographer than mine; thus the actual sequence of Ruskin's disillusiones and reconversions will not appear in this summary

#### FREEDOM VERSUS PRUDERY

Ruskin believed that taste in art, as well as in living, followed a relative principle and a method of trial and error. He trusted experiments with sense impressions; he refused to commit himself to an arbitrary standard. This is a parallel in art to his intense aversion to monasticism in religious life, which he felt set up a sinfully proud, arbitrary and mistaken "service of God; namely, desiring what they cannot obtain, lamenting what they cannot avoid, and reflecting on what they cannot understand" <sup>2</sup> Good living, just as good art, demanded the full exercise of all the faculties—the heart as well as the intellect—a pure, energetic soul in a healthy body. Passions in themselves did not seem to him evil: they were the powers of great lives, powers which could and must be morally directed and rightly governed.

Now art, as I have explained, offered the noblest scope for the moral direction of instinctive passion; the right government, however, lay in an understanding of the nature of work. It was the worker who, as Carlyle said, "possesses the secret of life." The central tenet of Ruskin's ethical theory of life is to be discovered here. The right government of passions, the pure heart, the healthy

body were all to be found through work—but through work which was truly creative Salvation both for the individual and for society lay in creative industry

It must be said that in all the writing of Carlyle and Ruskin there is no more constructive, genuinely progressive notion than this "training for work by work," an ideal derived from Goethe<sup>3</sup> True enough, these Englishmen turned work into Duty, and Ruskin often fitted it to narrow lines of prejudice, yet it remained the one point in his ethics for the exercise of comparatively free, materialistic moral ideas His theory of moral purity and energy, developed before he read Carlyle,<sup>4</sup> prepared for his later exploitation of the social doctrine of work, in itself so essential to any faith in modern society.

For work in its creative sense was not a static concept; it had the capacity of growth, it fitted with a notion of a relative "taste" and an organic functioning of the whole man It also produced the reflections that absolute justice<sup>5</sup> was no more attainable than absolute truth, and that righteousness consisted largely in desire and hope of justice. Degrees of nobility, and even moral perfection were in this sense relative to the racial and educational advantages of individuals So too were the excellence and the perfection of objects of art relative to the instinctive nobility of the artist's sense of beauty, and the environmental forces determining his desire and his intellectual apprehension of truth. Leaving out the rest of Ruskin's opinions one could easily shape these into a system of values with no absolutes whatever something very near the recognition of a pleasure-pain principle.

But in direct contradiction to these courageous convictions there lies the evidence of extreme prudery and puritanical fear. The sexual instinct is considered irrelevant to art; it is condemned as blind, temporary, bestial

It is thus excluded from any careful evaluation of the emotional side of art.<sup>6</sup> The sensual beauty of Greek art is minimized, the strength of Greek civilization attributed to moral heroism and ascetic discipline. When the sensuality of Greek art is admitted, it is used to illustrate the degradation of the art and civilization of the later Greek periods.

Very often when the full energies of man were represented in art, Ruskin did not recognize them. Many narrow half-realized prejudices limited his perception of the full expression of "self." Nudity, love of riches, and the candidly realistic rendering of poverty, the actual life of "the lower orders"—all were absolutely banned from fine art. The subject matter of most Dutch and most modern French painting disgusted him. Thus, both life and art were often judged as if absolute morals were attainable. One could so easily fall back upon abstractions of "purity" *not* conceived in its material sense. There was that eternal and ever persistent absolute, the conscience, which must judge the "right causes" for which "noble" (and traditionally respectable) persons might experience joy, grief or love.

Even Ruskin's reflections upon the esthetics of fine language are open to ambiguous interpretations which, in their extremes, are in complete contradiction. In one of his best dicta he says, "To teach the meaning of a word thoroughly, is the secret of sympathy . . ." Now this is, in sum, about what Ogden and Richards have been saying in their "modern" esthetics,<sup>7</sup> but what opposition of meaning is possible from Ruskin's phrase when he adds "and its full charm is possible only to the gentle"? If gentle means aware, sympathetic, sensitive to the breadth of human interests (those we call physical as well as those we call spiritual) as it did sometimes mean to Ruskin, then certainly one discovers a very con-

structive, positive morality of art But if gentle means right-souled in accord with some code of antiquated chivalry, some ascetic tablet of sexual tabus, some social ethics based on an unconscious suspicion of "trade," of wealth and of the new industrial methods which were actually conditioning society, then the morality of art is irrelevant, blind and reactionary In a final analysis Ruskin's "gentility" is neither one nor the other, it is the conflict of the two; his very pages are at war with one another

#### HUMANISM VERSUS ASCETICISM

Ruskin's explanation of beauty illuminates another conflict, a struggle between instinct and sentiment His theory of the material origin of purity, his insistence upon energy as the prime source of beauty—the identification of holiness, in this sense, with health—these ideas lean toward a materialistic theory of beauty with utilitarian implications. Quite in line with such a theory is his general reliance upon instinctive activities of mind and body instead of intellectual Imagination was shown to be genuinely instinctive, academic methods of composing pictures were condemned for the reason that they were based on rules which no great and therefore no spontaneous artist could heed Love was important in sharpening the intellect itself; it was fundamental in the appreciation of beauty. Naturalism was partly responsible for this, as it was in Emerson's case when it encouraged him to throw down before the Phi Beta Kappa society in Cambridge the very dangerous and very hedonistic aphorism "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him." <sup>8</sup>

For Carlyle, for Emerson and for Ruskin the moral sentiment, which was thought "Natural," became "the



essence of religion " <sup>9</sup> All three tended to make a religion of morality or social duty Even the Bible, so often the source of inspiration to Ruskin, came finally under criticism as he followed the humanistic tendencies in his period What he considers the theory of "the soundest scholars and thinkers of Europe" he summarizes in *Time and Tide* Though reverent, it is extraordinarily worldly and unsupernatural He says that

" the mass of religious Scripture contains merely the best efforts which we hitherto know to have been made by any of the races of men towards the discovery of some relations with the spiritual world, that they are only trustworthy as expressions of the enthusiastic visions or beliefs of earnest men oppressed by the world's darkness, and have no more authoritative claim on our faith than the religious speculations and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Indians . . ." <sup>10</sup>

This was written in March, 1867, two years before the appearance of Matthew Arnold's *Hebraism and Hellenism*, which holds the plea for "reverent" study of varied cultures, later developed in the essays *Literature and Dogma*. It must be recalled, further, how strongly Ruskin, during the years in which he harkened to Carlyle, found what religion he could in man; and how, like the later Emerson, he felt "that the purpose of life seems to be to acquaint man with himself " <sup>11</sup>

Now opposed to this whole group of notions, inclining toward materialism and humanism, there is a counter group, sharply contradicting or profoundly qualifying each of the broad statements of the former Ruskin's reliance upon instinct in explaining art was fatal to a consistent view The "energy of Love" was itself ambiguous, it was instinctive, yet it must be distinguished from the "blind and transient instincts of the blood";

it was natural, yet it seemed to Ruskin the possible source of ideal order and harmony in art and in society.

There are, furthermore, Ruskin's views on science. His early enthusiasm for the perfectly safe geology and biology founded on *Genesis* cools and turns to an increasingly frightened suspicion of both the aims and methods of modern scientists. Lyell's theories were significant to him, largely because they presented a picture of geological evolution toward the better, a manifestation of the mystery of creation. Chamber's *Vestiges of Creation* he seems never to have read, and Darwin's theories, welcomed at first, soon became intolerable.<sup>12</sup> Though he never denied them, he belittled as best he could their significance, he took no part in the storm of controversy raging about Huxley's championing of the new evolution. The origin of man seemed to Ruskin irrelevant to the chief issue: that of man's present moral state. The very fact that Ruskin's moral system was open to materialistic implications made it the more impossible for him to examine very far the nature of instinct. he could not proceed with science to question the moral abstractions at the roots of conscience.

His theory of inherited gentility was in danger of turning into nothing more than the survival of the biologically (not the virtuously) fittest; yet it would have been intolerable to believe that the progenitors of "nobility" were after all gentleman apes! Hence his theory of gentility became unconsciously conditioned by a bourgeois idealism. Though he would have been violent in his denial of any such thing, it was respectability which modified and entangled Ruskin's sense of social values. His humanitarianism was inspirational rather than scientific. Like Carlyle, it contained sharp criticisms of the values by which the capitalist justified his success, but

it never outgrew the bourgeois limitations of its moral genesis.

The "noble" doctrine of work, to be sure, is extended to gentleman and clown, but a sharp discrimination between these higher and lower orders is rigidly kept. However uplifting art might be to all, the fine arts could be fully appreciated only by the gentle Workingmen were not encouraged to follow painting as a profession in Ruskin's classes,<sup>13</sup> and it did not take much perspicacity to discover that "noble" character could not really exist in a state of poverty, however much the poor might read his essays on nobility

This is one reason why Ruskin so hated trade, capitalism, competition and machinery, for to them he ascribed poverty. It is true that his love of "craftsmanship" and "earned wealth" encouraged his refusal to accept industrialism, but there is also good reason to believe that both financial security and respectability made it easier for him to idealize craftsmanship, to forget that material poverty at least could and once did accompany handicraft. His refusal to accept machinery and his troubled reflections on interest or usury<sup>14</sup> are robust prejudices just because they were founded on a puritanical fear of the sinfulness of easy wealth and a respectable intolerance for anything that would lessen, for the world, the painful joy of hard labor.

Finally, behind the clear criticism of supernaturalism in religious fantasy, lay his own supernatural naturalism: the fixed God-head, the Author of absolute and universal moral sense. This was the genuine idealization (following Carlyle) of a theological conscience; for Ruskin even at a late period of social reflection explicitly states that the source of this instinctive morality is "The Indwelling of the Holy Ghost."<sup>15</sup>

Carlyle's disciple had played an ironical trick on the

master, he had torn off the veil of Carlylean phraseology, and laid bare the original Biblical and theological source of the "Everlasting Yea." Thus in spite of sympathizing with the then modern "textual criticism," it is very easy for Ruskin to slip through Biblical language back into his early horror of evil, magnified by a frightened conscience. Though tempered by a growing intellect, this conscience is powerfully active through Ruskin's long life in discriminating, and quite irrationally,<sup>16</sup> one instinct from another. His "natural" morality and his broad humanism were not really detached states of mind, periods of calm that the greatly wise attain, they were temporary victories in an inescapable conflict between the impulse to glorify physical fact and the impulse to deny it.

#### MORALS WITH WINGS

The conflicts between puritanical and materialistic notions, between a broad humanism and a narrow respectability, are further complicated in Ruskin's work by his very attempts to escape them. The intellectual idealization of the Platonists had its influence upon his moral and esthetic systems. He would not candidly face the dramatic antinomy which his trust in sense impressions and his fear of hedonistic pleasure imposed upon his theory. The doctrine of "contemplation," vague but highly spiritual, made it possible for him to avoid this contradiction in his theory of beauty. The Platonic elements in sentimental naturalism assured Ruskin that material observations were not entirely material: facts soon became types of ideas. Just so, the Platonic aristocracy of philosophers changed under Carlyle's influence to an aristocracy of talent and spiritual leadership. These qualities rested upon instinctive morality which was in its turn explained by the Holy Ghost. Only by interpolating

such ideal abstractions could the moral character of art be extended into social concepts without danger of utilitarian degradation.

Just as symmetry had suggested absolute justice, the Platonic associations in the artistic principles of unity and proportion were easily extended into ethical ideals of relative justice. Ruskin conjured up the hope of apportioning opportunity for all members of a community. As the formal principles of fine art were ultimately rooted in the moral integrity of the individual, so in society, the principles of political and social order were based after all upon individual morality. The beginning of all constructive life was for Ruskin, as it was for Carlyle, in the individual soul. Only through the right condition of heart could the health and happiness of society be secured.

The desire for beauty translates into a social "energy of Order and of Love." The energy of love, in social terms, is charity or "kindness" or "the innumerable conditions of gentleness." Thus, as "the desire for beauty in material things" was found to be associated with "the love of order in material things" or formal principles of composition in art, so the imaginative purity (the sign of divine energy in the artist) translates into unselfish social imagination. This is manifested first in the individual through the right government of the passions on the humanitarian principle of useful work. Love should be operative, not merely as a sentimental but as a vital and therefore practical force in humanity; the poverty, destitution and the disintegrating forces in society should stimulate the individual will to act, to take its part in the work of the whole social body.

Social imagination is not then merely speculative, it is truly creative. The individual must find his life through creative work and so assure social health. Work in this

sense is the very condition of life and, by this conception of work, life and art become inseparable. "To get your country clean, and your people lovely,—” says Ruskin, "I assure you that is a necessary work of art to begin with” Art (though not necessarily fine art) has, in this sense, its supreme social justification Without it, work is not creative, life is valueless. The great theme of the chapter on "Gothic" in the *Seven Lamps*, is repeated again and again over a period of many years:

" . . . life without industry is guilt, and industry without art is brutality and for the words 'good' and 'wicked,' used of men, you may almost substitute the words 'Makers' and 'Destroyers' Far the greater part of the seeming prosperity of the world is, so far as our present knowledge extends, vain wholly useless for any kind of good, but having assigned to it a certain inevitable sequence of destruction and of sorrow ”<sup>17</sup>

Thus beauty, analyzed before architecture, is the source<sup>18</sup> of the social creed The moral ideas in beauty are pushed even into the ethical assumptions underlying economic concepts Wealth itself is not material, nor utility founded on the mere exigencies of life. Wealth in our usual sense, Ruskin calls "riches” The only significance riches possess is the power that lies in them; their power over men. They are good or bad according to how they are used Wealth deals with the properties of things, but of things "*essentially* valuable” The failure to recognize this, Ruskin thought, was the intolerable error of the popular economics of his time.

What then is value? Value in one sense is the "absolute power of anything to support life,” and here one should remember the associations of life with energy, and energy with the term purity This is the value called "intrinsic” But things are valuable in still another sense; there is an "effectual value,” which is their intrinsic value

plus their "acceptant capacity". their capacity for ethical or social use. One is again thrown back to the theory of beauty, for about this "acceptant capacity" there is the suggestion of the "felicitous fulfilment of function"—in this case, of social function. Production, therefore, for Ruskin, is or should be the production of valuable things; not the production of riches which is the aim of modern high speed industry. For the production of riches does not entail always the production of things essentially useful to life, nor indeed, the production of the *capacity to use* things which is most fundamentally necessary to the good life. Such is the argument against the practice of usury—which the Utilitarians since Bentham had justified. For Ruskin "There is," therefore, "no real wealth but life", life means, not mere existence, but joy in work.

The "false" laws of the "vulgar political economy," such as competition or supply and demand, are condemned to give way to "laws" founded on real "sciences" and a more profound theory of value. To this extent Ruskin follows Carlyle's transcendentalism: he believed that one could never sell "Life or any part of . . . Life in a satisfactory manner." Yet he did not therefore dismiss the matter of wages with the mere rhetoric of Carlyle's chapter on "Reward" in *Past and Present*. "Money for my little piece of work 'to the extent that will allow me to keep working' . . . but 'wages' . . . !" Ruskin took literally his belief in the "effectual value" of money; he attempted, in discussion of wages, to establish some objective value or worth in work which he believed was "just as fixed and real as the specific gravity of a substance."

It was a vain effort, for he was projecting his own impressionistic sentiments into the general complex of activities, just as in the analysis of beauty he projected

his feelings into the natural world. He could not make joy in work more objective than the joy in the moral experience of beauty, this value was an ethical impression—a psychological state of mind. Its root lay in the individual moral sense. What Ruskin could never see was that it is vain to attempt to extract from such an abstraction the precise and just fruits of specie payments.

Yet, in moments of unguarded enthusiasm he contradictorily enough implied the hopelessness of the task which Carlyle's chapter on "wages" might have shown him he could not accomplish. What could be a more complete admission of the impossibility of fixing absolute monetary values on work than the story<sup>19</sup> of the carpenter, Allen, who labored on a beautiful door for a lord and whose three days of work applied to repairs on a destitute cottage belonging to that lord would have saved the cottagers' lives? The carpenter, Ruskin suggests, might have been "equally paid for his work by the owner of the greater house, only the work not consumed selfishly on his own walls." It is true that if the work had been unselfishly directed, the lives of two peasants might have been saved, but the economic question would still be unsettled. It lies in the comparative value, in money, of a lord's pleasure and the lives of two peasants! Carlyle avoided this kind of issue by candid mysticism—by insisting that true work could only be measured "by Heaven."<sup>20</sup> Ruskin, in the above illustration and because he considered carpentry true work, is confronted by the necessity for economic measurement here and now.

But these difficulties did not deter Ruskin from translating the imaginative purpose of creative composition into ethical purpose. The central moral issues of economics, he believed, concern the motif of a life, just as the central issues of painting concern the motif of a picture. "Industry, frugality, and discretion," he said,



"the three foundations of economy, are moral qualities, and cannot be attained without moral discipline" The question is "not how much do they make" but "to what purpose do they spend?" The answers lie in the "instinctive moral emotions"—spend for the love of order and of kindness—that was what Ruskin himself tried to do, literally, and that is what is implied in his challenge to John Stuart Mill and his followers to tell him how to spend his money <sup>21</sup> Unity and energy are, in society as in art, principles based on the moral law "Government and Co-operation are in all things the Laws of Life, Anarchy and Competition the Laws of Death." The gospel, to use F. W. Roe's excellent phrase is "the conservation of the individual by means of the creative impulse," <sup>22</sup> and the true laws of economics are parallel to the laws of art This—the very opposite of the estheticism characterized by "Art for Art's sake"—is what Ruskin implied by his extravagant and misunderstood phrase: "Taste is the only morality"!

#### SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

All this, with a steady wind of Platonic optimism, makes very pleasant sailing indeed Yet Ruskin encountered adverse and powerful currents. Gentleness and charity kept turning out to mean things that had behind them a leisure class point of view and could only with difficulty be applied to the working poor of "the lower orders" This brought about the most incomprehensible contradiction between socialistic and aristocratic principles, embarrassing to any detailed discussion of ways and means, wages and facts Yet these were the least of difficulties and could, because they were common to the period, have been passed by. What cannot longer remain obscure to any twentieth century student (though

it has eluded almost all the critics I have read) is a weakness of a far more profound kind

Industry in the machine sense was there to stay, at least for longer than Ruskin or anybody else could determine. But Ruskin did not accept the fact, he refused to see it. His attack upon industrialism is more than a quixotic protest against things as they were. He could not like Goethe find poetry in a cotton factory and he did not follow Carlyle's idealization of the possible "Chivalry of Labor" in its industrial manifestations. He was more literal than Carlyle, for though Carlyle had said "in all true Work, were it but true hand labor there is something of divineness," still, he could imagine for some future "Plugson of Undershot" a true "victory over cotton." Ruskin could not. He hated machinery, and iron and competition and division of labor and everything aggressively industrial. His concept of gentility, his sentimental naturalism blinded him, like other Victorians,<sup>23</sup> to the importance of new methods. The machine had no beauty, no typical character for the suggestion of moral or spiritual attributes, the machine could express no personality.

For these opinions he had a double justification. Machines seemed to him fundamentally unesthetic; for it never occurred to him that power and skill could be manifest in machines themselves or designs for them. So far as he could see their use discouraged refinement of perception and feeling; city men were becoming incapable of perceiving natural beauty, the external grounds for "noble emotions."<sup>24</sup> Division of labor, furthermore, inhibited the necessary unity in the work of one individual—the esthetic unity of perception, imagination and skill; and the whole process in which division of labor appeared to become necessary was fundamen-

tally wrong because it was perverting genuine value into false

Manufacture, for example, demanded that the artist or craftsman concentrate on the practical technique of profit, not on the real economy of useful or beautiful objects. This involved the whole diabolical order in a subservience to popular taste, untrained, dulled, vulgar Esthetic trial and error, so necessary to appreciation and creation, to the conveying of true impressions and true feelings, to the expression of character, were completely destroyed. The moral ways of life which lay in the fine and the useful arts were being denied society by a system which was based on vicious principles of a false philosophy of "riches." Machinery was the invention of the slaves of this perverted order. Machinery was inert, sterile, truly unproductive. Ruskin, indeed, even came to believe "that all the joy and reverence we ought to feel in looking at a strong man's work have ceased in us." <sup>25</sup>

The "art impulse in industry," now so conscious an ideal to the prophets of modern Germany, Italy, Japan and America, meant something very different to Ruskin, and those idealists who attribute to him and to William Morris the genesis of the notion are profoundly unhistorical. For by "industry" Ruskin did not mean industrialism, he meant, indeed, precisely the opposite; he used "industry" in its medieval connotation: he meant work. He believed in hand labor, not in "production." The lower forms of art would lead to a greater strength of hand and mind for higher branches. Handcraft was the beginning of creative work, both artistically and socially. Here lay his profound weakness.

The social theories of Ruskin and Morris brought forth the Arts and Crafts Societies, offspring of Victorian despair and a misapplied Platonism, doomed from their

birth to an unsocial life among sensitive though maladjusted men and neurotic spinsters. For "The Arts and Crafts" are in themselves leisure class products of an industrial era. The "art impulse in industry," in any genuine sense, had to come by the attraction of man to the machine, it was to be born from the womb of the factory itself. It necessarily involved a recognition of design for the machine and for factory labor as modern work. Whether this recognition was expressed first in the "dismal" philosophy of Karl Marx (whom Ruskin never mentions) or in the optimism of Fabian Socialists, Fascists or Bolshevists matters little. Ruskin's idea had no real connection with Victorian England industrialized.

The doctrine of work which Carlyle drew from Goethe carried on into all forms of modern social theory, it is as implicit in Lenin's ideal as in Mussolini's or Hoover's. But its relevance to modern society depends upon the recognition of the instruments of industry and upon a concept of mass production. Yet the problems of population suggested by Malthus found no place in Carlyle's or Ruskin's political economy; and Ruskin's alienation of the machine led Morris to a reactionary medievalism which was abortive. Neither of these prophets failed to see the melodramatic effects of industry, but their ethical abstractions had reference only to individuals when the mass was already the inevitable term of industrial thought.

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## CHAPTER II

### RUSKIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS

#### MORALS VERSUS ETHICS

THE extension of art into society, therefore, brought even greater complication to Ruskin's system of moral ideas. The ethical assumptions in his political economy dramatized 'the already existing conflicts of moral notions. Jeremy Bentham had perceived these forces of ethical confusion some fifty years before Carlyle and Ruskin got their visions. Moralists who impulsively used both "the principles of utility" and ascetic principles indiscriminately, with no apparent appreciation of their inner contradiction, he called "capricious" and coined the term "Ipse-dixitism" to refer to the authority behind their confusions.

In his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789), Bentham reduces all moral ideas to three possible systems. There is the system based on the principle of utility, and there are the two systems adverse to this—asceticism and caprice (or Ipse-dixitism). Various capricious theories of right and wrong may all be reduced, Bentham thought, to principles of a "sympathy or antipathy"<sup>1</sup> or, in other words, to an aggressive desire for pleasure or a fear of it. When forced to supply some absolute criterion other than the principle of utility, men holding these confused moralities resort to a great variety of phrases. Bentham listed them with shrewd comments. Among them are "The Moral Sense" (conscience), Com-

mon Sense, Understanding, Rule of Right, Fitness of Things, Laws of Nature, the Law of Right Reason, Natural Justice, Natural Equity, Good Order, Truth, the Doctrine of Election ("I am of the number of the elect!") and "Repugnancy to Nature" (it is unnatural) There is scarcely one phrase that does not appear many times on Ruskin's pages.<sup>2</sup> Bentham's perspicacity in describing how men often confuse feeling with rational grounds of right action is very striking His strictures apply to the confusion of moral meanings in "Noble Grounds for Noble Emotions" which art, according to Ruskin, is supposed to present.<sup>3</sup>

But Bentham is not, of course, describing Ruskin or any one person; he is characterizing an ethical age which extended far beyond his own The confounding of rational ethics with the intuitively apprehended voice of God is common to literature of inspiration down to the last decades of the nineteenth century. The German idealists' distinction between rational "understanding," on the one hand, and intuitive "reason," on the other, is one of the early sources of confusion Duty was associated with reason by the English poets and naturalists. The simple theological naturalism of Butler was, as I have shown, complicated by an infusion of intellectual casuistry.<sup>4</sup> Thus Wordsworth prays Duty, the "awful Power," the "Stern daughter of the Voice of God" to give him the "confidence of reason," not understanding.

Yet the romantic poets, who formed a definite part of the background of Victorian prophets, could never really explain evil. Evil in the natural world they tried not to admit, and evil in the "natural" but social activities of their fellows they avoided by calling it "custom" or the abuses of society These, Wordsworth said, lay upon the growing boy "with a weight heavy as frost, and deep almost as life." But to ask Wordsworth what was the

difference between "custom" and "conscience" would have been to force him into the capricious absolutes that had been the targets of Bentham's derisive scorn.<sup>5</sup> And evil in social and industrial forms continued to trouble the Victorians. The curse of sentimental naturalism lay in the possible discovery that the facts of nature and of human nature furnished no absolute evaluation for natural impulse, but made more obvious than ever a need for righteousness. As this dawned little by little upon the more serious spirits in Victorian society it brought with the new science, the new invention, the new fortunes, and the new poverty, the most desperate efforts to escape moral bankruptcy. Both the narrow rationalism of the Utilitarians and the passionate, positive moralizing of the idealists are attempts to escape the ethical dilemma in the conflict of traditional moral sentiments with new facts.

Material forces themselves forbade by their very advancement any profound doubts that God might not be in His heaven. The romantic theory of individualism, which had fitted so nicely to the naturalistic doctrine of the potential development of each species in nature, could, after 1859, be transformed with equal enthusiasm into the theory of moral evolution. New facts, difficulties, contradictions seemed to produce but fresh assurance for hedonist, ascetic and "Ipse-dixitist." The tangle of moral assumptions, the confusion of attitudes toward poverty, wealth, progress and piety among the poets is almost egregious. The Tennyson of *The Two Voices* achieves an escape from moral dilemma by a respectability not unlike Ruskin's,<sup>6</sup> and *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* manifests clearly enough the prudery rather than the ethics which characterizes the Laureate's later work. The heterodox impersonations of Browning's moral imagination crystallize only in the outlines of a romantic



optimism and a vaguely conventional religious faith. Poetical moralizing from Patmore's *Angel in the House* to Meredith's *Modern Love* expands "The Infinite Nature of Duty." Yet the most definite examples appear in poems as remote from ethical concern as Bailey's *Festus*, or Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*.

Emerson could "plant himself indomitably on his instincts," but, after seeing an Italian Ballet, "could not help feeling the while that it were better for mankind if there were no such dancers."<sup>7</sup> Carlyle could consider "the truly supernatural" to be "forever the natural";<sup>8</sup> but remain unable to concoct a theoretical (to say nothing of a practical) procedure for recognizing a hero when he turned up Matthew Arnold, who protested that the trinity was "a fairy tale of three Lord Shaftesburys," who believed himself "delivered from the bondage of Bentham!" was forced to resort to obvious casuistry in order to "make *reason* and the *Will of God* prevail." Like Ruskin, he de-spiritualized God into a kind of moral absolute—a "Something not ourselves which makes for Righteousness"—and more bitterly than Ruskin he analyzed the cultural pretensions of a cockney capitalism. But the moral assumptions of his own leisurely culture were as inadequate as Ruskin's to satisfy the ethical demands of society. Retreating from the roar of machines and the spectacle of industrial poverty Arnold could argue only for "sweetness" (purity), "light" (truth), "life" (energy), and "sympathy" (gentility).<sup>9</sup>

Ruskin's use of the moral faculty to justify or explain his absolute moral sense, is, therefore, almost trite. Even so keen a metaphysician as Mansell announced in his popular lectures that "there must be a moral sense, to which moral objects are pleasant, as there are physical senses to which material objects are pleasant."<sup>10</sup> For naturalism had continued from 1840 to 1870 to justify

the encouraging belief that Nature could furnish a basis for principles of behavior. Yet naturalistic morality seemed to the younger Utilitarians as dangerous as the doctrine of utility appeared to Ruskin and Carlyle. Under this disguise, as Bentham had pointed out, an aristocracy (one might now say a plutocracy) could hold "as long as possible to the principles of 'taste,' taking furthermore, great pains to constitute itself its supreme arbiter." Thus Mill rose to a passionate attack in criticisms of Sedgwick and Whewell.<sup>11</sup>

The battle was kept alive for years. Mill's early reviews were refuted by Mansell with far more learning than such impulsive men as Ruskin could muster. Mansell even worked up a brief history of the *Moral Sense* to defend its sanction and to demolish the doctrines of Bentham and all his followers.<sup>12</sup> Mill shortly before his death felt the controversy to be already bitter enough and decided to postpone publishing his *Three Essays on Religion* which contained the brilliant *Essay Nature*, the most demolishing criticism of sentimental and moral naturalism in the century.

The belief in the moral sense, however, was almost irradicable. Though Mill's polemic (published in 1874) was continued in reviews and in a lucid essay called *The Basis of Morals*,<sup>13</sup> by Frederick Harrison and though Thomas Huxley fought intrepidly against "the religion of nature," it is ironical to observe the persistent "moral sense" turning up at the very roots of this arch-antagonist's philosophy. In the very same year that he gave his last famous "Romanes Lecture" *Evolution and Ethics* (1892) he wrote,<sup>14</sup>

"The moral sense is a very complex affair—dependent in part upon associations of pleasure and pain, approbation and disapprobation, formed by education in early youth, *but in part on an innate sense of moral beauty and ugliness* (how

originated need not be discussed), which is possessed by some people in great strength, while some are totally devoid of it "

Ruskin, it is clear, had made no mistake in basing an esthetic upon an abstraction which, after forty years of advancing science, had still to be compromised with in its associations with beauty!

### RUSKIN'S CAPRICE

Now of all the Victorian prophets John Ruskin is the most capricious because his work is most representative of the variety of Victorian interests. He is the apotheosis of contradiction in the period. His ethical views are, as I have shown, the extensions of naturalistic esthetics as well as naturalistic morals and theology.

Because one branch of naturalism led through misinterpreted Rousseau to the hedonistic behaviorism of the Utilitarians, Ruskin comes at certain points very close to Bentham himself while remaining most bitterly his opponent. At one moment he is discovering moral law, almost a pantheistic deity, in the world of natural phenomena; at another, he is disinclined toward "the moral of landscape" and the "poet's "dreaming love of natural beauty" in the interests of "hard work" or "human nature" <sup>15</sup>. At one moment he is quoting Richard Hooker, at another pleased with Rousseau, or referring to Plato or a botanical specimen, or Christianizing Aristotle or John Locke or praising Carlyle or quarreling with him <sup>16</sup> and almost simultaneously he is founding beauty on sensual pleasure, admitting the relativity of taste and dedicating art to the glory of a God about whom he admitted he knew little.

Ruskin believed that art contributed to happiness by bringing pleasure to the individual. This was the very

"expression of his rational and disciplined delight" in beauty. Yet beauty was itself based on "sensual" impressions and the most important of all qualities in the experience of beauty—purity—was discovered to be essentially material. It was identified with natural energy. Certainly there is nothing ascetic about these views; they could easily be extended into utilitarian esthetics with an arithmetic of pleasure and pain instead of a mystical morality as a criterion of their value. They are fortified, moreover, by a theory of the social value and function of art itself that lays stress upon its utility, upon its profound relation to the daily life.<sup>17</sup> Art's two chief functions, Ruskin once said, were "to state a true thing, or to adorn a serviceable one."

One might even use Bentham's phrases to paraphrase Ruskin's conclusion that art "tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness" and "to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness" to the individual and to society. For, like Bentham, Ruskin thought that the "interest of the community is the sum of the interests of individuals who compose it": the extension of his most mystical morality into economic theory depends logically upon this "plain" view of society. Yet it is at just this point in the social justification of art that Ruskin illustrates what Bentham would have called his *Ipse-dixitism*. At this point his mystical naturalism absolutely contradicts the utilitarian implications of the above opinions and forces him to resort to generalities such as the "Moral Sense," the "Fitness of Things," the "Laws of Nature," "Good Order" and "Truth" to establish the authority and the sanction that his emotions, not his intellect, demanded.

His conception of use or utility is the center of this antipathy to Bentham and to the whole Utilitarian school.

It was defined with callow but explicit utterance in the first chapter of *Modern Painters* II (1846) as follows:

"It will be well in the outset that I define exactly what kind of Utility I mean to attribute to art, and especially to that branch of it which is concerned with those impressions of external Beauty, whose nature it is our present object to discover

"That is, to everything created pre-eminently useful, which enables it rightly and fully to perform the functions appointed to it by its Creator. Therefore that we may determine what is chiefly useful to man, it is necessary first to determine the use of Man to himself

"Man's use and function (and let him who will not grant me this follow me no further, for this I purpose always to assume) are, to be the witness of the glory of God, and to that glory by his reasonable obedience and resultant happiness."

So it was that, twelve years later, when emphasizing the practical value of art, he could interpret its functions of helping men "to see things" by referring to "the bearing that all art should have on the revelation of God in the works of creation, and the teaching of all mankind of His visible truth"<sup>18</sup> Just so could he, in 1870, pervert Aristotle by asserting that "All the great arts have for their object either the support or the exaltation of human life, —usually both, and their dignity and ultimately their very existence, depend on their being 'μετα λόγου ἀληθους', that is to say, apprehending, with right reason, the nature of the materials they work with, *of the things* they relate or represent, and *of the faculties* to which they are addressed."<sup>19</sup> It was by the twist of natural utility into the strangest form of evangelicism that art could be said to have as its three principal functions the doing of material service, the perfecting (though not the producing)

of the moral state, and the encouragement of religious impulses in the sense of relating "to us the utmost ascertainable truth respecting visible things and moral feelings."

Ruskin had no metaphysical basis and no reasonable logic behind his search for a more imaginative standard of value than that achieved by the doctrinaire Bentham and his followers. His position remained unphilosophical—even evangelical. the beautiful is useful because it is beautiful, through its contemplation, revelation is possible to the pure in heart Yet the gospel had value to his age, especially in humanizing utilitarian standards, because it appealed to the sense of authority This is to most of us no longer real in moral matters, but the moral sense was genuinely revered by Ruskin and the majority of his contemporaries. He had to keep an absolute criterion; natural morality supplied it

Goethe's more humanistic ideal of self-realization and control had little real effect on Ruskin's theory Behind all his rationalization lies neither the moral "apprentice" Wilhelm Meister nor the natural man of Rousseau, but a combination of the economic value, suggested by his early reading of Sismondi,<sup>20</sup> with the simple mysticism of the Christian natural philosopher Carl von Linné whose *Systema Naturae* (properly, says Ruskin, "Imperium Naturae") he seems to have read constantly in later years, and to have used as a source of his political economy.<sup>21</sup> This he quotes even in the 1883 Preface to the Second Volume of *Modern Painters*, to lend a then belated authority to his naturalistic theory of beauty.

Yet the emphasis of his capricious morality shifts back and forth throughout his writing. In 1846 the ethical function of art is presumptuously evangelical; it is to celebrate, in a sense quite close to that of the Catholic theological esthetics of Patmore, Thompson and Mrs.

Meynell, the glory of God, bringing the realization of this glory, as it were, to sensitive hearts. In 1860 art's function is conceived rather in practical and social terms. "And in these books of mine," he writes, "their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope."<sup>22</sup> Thus, a clean country and good morals are even desired for the sake of art, and art is understood as *the* way of healthy life. At this period the emphasis upon the revelatory powers of fine art is secondary. Yet scarcely six years later and still within what I have called his "social period," Ruskin claims, after referring to *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones of Venice* in particular. "In all my past work, my endeavor has been to show that good architecture is essentially religious—the production of a faithful and virtuous, not of an infidel and corrupted people," and again, "I am trying to prove to you the honour of your houses and your hills, not that the Church is not sacred—but that the whole Earth is "<sup>23</sup> This is an example of how the moral or humanitarian interest has been grafted upon his earlier passionate convictions of natural theology.

By 1870, as I have said, the separation of morals from religion was complete, and, though natural beauty is still a source of artistic truth and beauty, its supernatural or "naturalistic" significance as a source of dreamy contemplation is minimized. The social value of art, or rather its social necessity, has been extended into many writings, notably *The Political Economy of Art*, and *Time and Tide* (1867) which make art in Ruskin's highest sense a "utility." But the earlier convictions were never given up; they reappear slightly transformed in the seventies. By 1883 the second volume of *Modern Painters* is again approved; the mystical aspect of "contemplation" is again emphasized in the explicit revelation of his read-

ing of Aristotle, art has returned to its first discovered glory, the Glory of God. The Platonic tradition and the puritanical had conquered "The Infinite nature of Duty" is triumphant.

But from this time on, there is a capricious alternation in Ruskin's thought, between an aversion for the second volume of *Modern Painters* and a desire to glorify it. He writes to Norton in 1886 after one of his serious mental illnesses that he had read Sydney Smith's *Moral Philosophy* and greatly admires it. In *Praeterita*, not more than two years later at the most, he declares that had these lectures been printed five years earlier than 1850 and had they "then fallen in my way, the second volume of *Modern Painters* would either never have been written at all, or written with thankful deference to the exulting wit and gracious eloquence with which Sydney Smith had discerned and adorned all that I wished to establish, twenty years before."<sup>24</sup>

Smith's lectures were definitely in the spirit of a romantic morality, but not mystical. It is therefore fair to say that Ruskin closed his life, as he had lived it, divided in thought with an apparent conflict still unresolved between a desire to make art a necessary social virtue, a way of life, an expression of the fullest development of the moral nature of man—and that other desire to conceive it as a communication to men of the spiritual truths in an idealized universe. This spiritual idealization was in fact never really relinquished, for in spite of that period when morals were sharply separated from religion, the basis of daily life itself became ultimately religious. Even as an expression of the moral rather than religious nature of man, great art was conceived, he felt, with the passion of religious enthusiasm.

The moral values, then, upon which Ruskin based his esthetics were contradictory; his attitudes toward re-



ligion, nature, man, alternated from a recognition of material needs to the transient assurance of immaterial hopes Yet Ruskin was no more at war with his romantic inheritance than many other Victorians. Between the limited utility of Bentham and the ethical mysticism of Carlyle, the individualist of Ruskin's generation found no consistent or satisfactory course. As always in a rapidly changing age, men failed to perceive that their ideals were the remnants of antithetical traditions and not rational inferences from the conditions that confronted them daily Ruskin's morality, therefore, was naturalistic, respectable, humanitarian, sometimes even practical, but it flowered into profound *ethical* confusion

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## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION

#### UNSETTLED QUESTIONS

THE inevitable censure of the twentieth century upon the failures of the nineteenth has, in matters of art, focussed strikingly upon Ruskin. For a generation or more Ruskin's principal thesis that the meaning of art lay in its moral values has been ridiculed. But the thesis has also been misunderstood, and not without irony. Popular opinion has repudiated Ruskin as a theorist because of his supposed confusion of esthetics with morals. Yet his insistence upon the ethical value of art is historically Ruskin's most important contribution to his period. It is his "political economy of art" that leads to his penetrating criticism of economic value. The moral features of his esthetics cannot lightly be pushed aside, for an attempt to understand them inevitably illuminates the profound bias in the twentieth century glorification of abstract and non-moral appreciation.

As I have attempted to show in the previous chapters, Ruskin's trouble lay not in the confusion of esthetics with morals but of one sort of morality with another. Esthetic questions as such are not confused by him, but ethical and moral issues are. It is the restrictions which Victorian gentility, respectability and piety impose upon the content of art and the personality of the artist that irk the twentieth century enthusiast; it is the superficiality of the ethical foundation of morals or the failure

to perceive what we should call social facts that annoy those who interest themselves in the social importance of art. For the rest, popular censure must resort to niggling over terms.

Ruskin's "moral" was very close, in its theoretical context, to our term "emotional." Today one finds the terms *sensitive*, *fine*, *civilized* used in precisely the context with the term *nature* that Ruskin was wont to use "noble" or "moral." That man's nature, we say, is fine, this one's crude; that art is sensitive or civilized; this is cheap, vulgar, provincial or limited. These distinctions are esthetically more confused for us than they ever could have been to Ruskin; for we shy at their moral connotation and attempt characteristically to make them intellectual, biological, psychological or esthetic.

Only those twentieth century readers who have outgrown the "art for art's sake" phase of appreciative experience (the "pure design" and "significant form" phases included) can allow themselves to admit the importance of Ruskin's morality of art to this age. The two most serious charges against Ruskinism each betray a limitation more striking than any he himself exhibited. The charge that Ruskin by making art moral denied its emotional value rises from a bias which itself tends to deny the social or ethical factors involved in the arts. The charge that Ruskin by making art moral denied the "plastic" or "formal" values in art rises from a bias which tends to deny the relation between these forms of expression and personality.

Both charges, moreover, are false. For Ruskin did not deny the value of sensation or the appreciation of formal qualities; he even emphasized technique when technique is understood in its relation to the other values in art.<sup>1</sup> "Aesthetics" or the instinctive delight in pleasurable sensations were the foundation of his esthetics, the contem-

plative experience of beauty, hence the most moral division of his theory, "Beauty," was not primarily ascetic. Rather does Ruskin emphasize the importance of sensual pleasure, understood in relation to the whole nature of man. Though he indulges in frequent puritanical qualifications, his prevailing conviction is, he claims, like Goethe's, that the root of the science of "aesthetics" "depends on the health of soul *and* body, and the proper exercise of *both*, not only through years but generations" <sup>2</sup>

But Ruskin carried his esthetics beyond Goethe's. He combined the traditional "Imitation" theory with a theory of "Pleasure" and he added a theory of "Technique" or workmanship. Three significant conclusions outline the scope of his arguments: the artistic perception of truth is spontaneous and unified; beauty is an impression at once sensual and morally symbolical; style is the reflection of character in the fullest sense.

The doctrines of characteristic truth and ideal imagination were related by their common root in personality, and the theory of the technical meaning of art was joined on the same emotional basis. The false representation of the appearance of things, or art that depends upon superficial imitation, rises, he perceived, from immoral motives or motives essentially unesthetic. The desire to attract popular approval, to attain commercial success, to exploit the sensual or the vain or the luxurious aspects of living for themselves seemed to him irrelevant to the purpose of art, immoral and unrealistic. The exploitation of any one element of living at the expense of all others was his explanation of coarse or vulgar or morbid art as compared to that called great or fine. This distinction, furthermore, he carried into workmanship of all kinds and into the useful arts.

Such a view involved the notion that artistic vision is

seeing things with completeness. The esthetic or the "contemplative" way of experience is that of apprehending things in their specific or distinct wholeness. Behind the energy of imagination lay the unity of artistic perception, in seeing the thing in its characteristic form, in its "typical beauty," in its relation to men. This was fundamental to Ruskin's "naturalist" and moral esthetics.

The theoretical confusion that arose from this position was not of esthetics with morals but of esthetics with mysticism. Often Ruskin approaches the esthetic mysticisms of Fichte, Schelling and even Schopenhauer. His universalized moral sense or moral law suggests the "underlying will" as opposed to the intellectualist "idea" of Hegel, by which these philosophers of the "characteristic" explain unity and permanence in art. For Ruskin as for Schopenhauer everything in human and external nature was to some extent characteristic of the "underlying will," hence beautiful to some degree. Ruskin might well have agreed that the artist understands "the half-uttered speech of nature." But "the will," for Ruskin, was not a metaphysical concept; it was a moral law involving simple moral or emotional states of mind; moreover, Ruskin did not conceive "the object of art" as a "Platonic Idea." It was often identified with energy and health. Thus art, though it might be understood as an objectification of the essence "will" could never in any sense for Ruskin free us from the desire to live which Schopenhauer's oriental pessimism considered the profound vice of human nature.<sup>3</sup>

But just because Ruskin avoided metaphysics he fell into a very obvious kind of mystical error. His sense of purpose distorted his perception of everything "natural." When he becomes mystical, the poet or the artist projects the unity of self into the world in the form of some anthropomorphic personality or, as we have seen, some

magnified conscience. Ruskin, thus, often cast the shadow of his own conscience over the world and perverted the "truth" and the "beauty" of nature into personal prejudice. By so doing he lost the distinction of his moral esthetic vision.

Theoretically, however, his position was very important because by relying upon instinctive moral elements rather than intellectual or scientific he was able to enlarge the scope of artistic expression to the limits of human emotion. His own personal conscience and the morality of his period limited his understanding of this emotional range, he intruded judgments of good and bad, high and low into the substance of art that differ very much from the interpolations which the twentieth century prefers. But there is no theoretical confusion in the fact of interpolating moral judgments into this emotional field, for the judgment itself as it enters a picture or an appreciation, Ruskin believed, was instinctive, emotional, esthetic. He was aware that scientific or intellectual knowing split up nature into anatomy, formal truth into academic rules, beauty into metaphysics. Art, he insisted, sought the true impressions of the appearance of things; it got this truth "instinctively," but with a unified (or imaginative) apprehension. Art, therefore, represented the appearance of things as wholes. Unity of body and mind lay at the center of poetic truth.

One distinction, therefore, of esthetic knowing is this unity in "contemplation." It arises, Ruskin thought, from the nature of moral emotion itself, which, on the one hand, is the essence of the appreciative aspect of art, and on the other of the imaginative or active. But the outline of Ruskin's theory at this point illustrates two principal shortcomings. One of them rises from the failure to fit his category of "Ideas of Power" or skill to the rest of the theory, and the other, from the failure to

define the nature of art as either communicative or expressive

Style reflected the unity just described as a manifestation of personality, skill depended upon character as much as upon knowledge. But the moral restrictions of gentility on the one hand and the Victorian fear of machinery on the other inhibited a full extension of this theory. Ruskin was capable enough of perceiving the technical refinements of Turner's paintings, but prejudice blinded his appreciation of the skill of many other artists, particularly the Dutch and French. In architecture he tended to restrict skill to refer to actual craft. In the industrial arts of his own period he refused it any possible reference to design. The fact that power, personality, skill could be manifest in designs for machine products, in the architecture of iron and cement, in the very engines of modern industry was never permitted to occur to his mind. He thus lost the chief ethical significance possible to the useful arts in modern times. This is particularly ironical for the fact that he tended, in his middle years, to exaggerate the technical importance of all the arts, fine and useful, to the point of obliterating moral beauty and the mystical truth he had earlier claimed for them.

It is in this same period that the second weakness in his theory appears most strikingly. Style reflected personality, it was in this sense the expression of the artist's feelings. But if this were true, could art also be said to convey truth, especially the sort of truth about the natural world that he claimed, in his first two books, it did convey? These are questions which have troubled the writings of many moderns. Suppose, one might say, that we grant that Ruskin meant by "moral emotion" no greater variety of things than today is meant by the general but simple term significant emotion; and suppose

also we grant that art is a language which has emotion as its principal concern, for this is implicit from the first to the last of Ruskin's pages. What then does art do? Does it primarily express this emotion or does it convey its truths? Secondly, what is the relation of what Ruskin calls "ideas" (which in their three principal roles correspond to visual impressions, feelings, and thoughts mixed with sentiments) to the expressive or the communicative purposes of art?

Ruskin's position in terms of these questions is anomalous. Ideas of truth are the impressions of the appearance of objects often emotionally idealized; ideas of beauty are the noble feelings or emotions that have arisen from sensation stimulated by objects, ideas of relation are a confused blend of sentimental and literary or religious ideas suggested in an inseparable state by objects of art.

Now it will be seen that the first elements—the true impressions of appearance—are those which lend an informative value to fine art. Thus when discussing them or when justifying art as having some social value, Ruskin stresses the importance of a communicative end. The artist is to convey these true impressions. The second elements—the purely emotional—have no informative value in this sense; they have pleasure value. But the feelings which the artist embodies in the art object are the expressions of his personality. They are the noble elements which he feels by "contemplating" things. It was the artist's business, Ruskin said, to express through the technical media of line, shape, light and mass, the "noble grounds for noble emotions." Whatever truths of fact or fancy the artist conveyed, especially in his imaginative composition, it is clear that Ruskin considered the result to express the artist's self. Thus in both his theory of beauty and of imagination as distinct from



his theory of truth Ruskin implies that art expresses while it communicates; he even implies that the end of "fine art," in so far as it deals with beauty, is to objectify personality, for beauty is really nothing more than noble moral emotion

The third group of constituents, however—the mixed emotions, the literary, moral and religious ideas—are, like the ideas of appearance, informative, they are given a special didactic or elevating purpose. In this group, too, are considered certain structural or "plastic" qualities that have their parallels among the purely emotional ideas which constitute beauty. In modern theories these would be elements in the contemplation of shapes or the relationships of design, or they would be illustrations of "empathy." But Ruskin has pulled them over into idealized reflections that are connected with religious attitudes; he deliberately gives them the function of revealing divine truth and stimulating moral symbols. In this sense and in so far as fine art deals in them, it may be said to be revelatory, especially when it deals with religion or the religious significance of nature. It is communicative in a specialized sense, it encourages religious feeling and conviction.

This unresolved dualism is to be understood as the result of Ruskin's religious and moral confusions. If his morality had been founded upon ethical rather than mystical concepts, if his religious opinions had remained definite, the contradiction in the function of art would have necessarily fallen into line. But, as has been shown, his experience was fundamentally a conflict; his personality at odds with itself. Out of this strife his esthetics reflect the ambiguous concern for a great range of emotional communications and expressions.

From a theoretical point of view this concern is obviously inconsistent especially when one tries to relate

all the emotional elements to some one artistic function. But the inconsistency is historically important. It will be recalled that up to Ruskin's time art had been primarily concerned with beauty. Even the psychological theories were an attempt to explain the beautiful. Ruskin, however, in his attempt to humanize beauty itself by reading into nature and art the indications of moral states, broadened the theoretical scope of natural beauty, moreover, he brought into art two other classes of feeling, ideas of "Truth" and of "Relation", these became increasingly important as his theory developed. He was inadvertently demolishing the spell which had for over a century held the theories of art in a formalistic bondage. Beauty became merely one of art's concerns, and not the most important one.

It is very important to recall that Ruskin, as his theories developed, used the term art in a broader and broader sense; the more he "naturalized" and humanized it, the more he destroyed its purely formal obsession with the beautiful. In so far as he emphasized the elements of truth, and indeed the mixed forms of moral and religious emotion, he approached at certain points a sharp discrepancy between beauty and truth. When he faced this, it was always to place beauty as such in a secondary position, and give the first importance to "truths of appearance"—to true impressions and to sincere, unified expressions of "noble emotion." Great artists, he said, might often be seen to have sacrificed beauty; but never had they sacrificed veracity in the contemplation or the expression of their experience.

As he carried out this distinction he had often to separate "fine" arts, which were useful only in an ideal sense, from the crafts, mural decoration and architecture. This was done by pointing to the specialized moral or emotional character of fine art. Fine art was less concerned

with mixed ideas, it was more insistent and more intense in its imaginative unity, and in its expression of the noble grounds (the plastic form) for noble emotions. It was more directly a revelation of personality. In modern terminology, it was thus more purely the objectification of self. Truth entered here in the sincerity of feeling, and the exactitude of idealized impression—which is to say that truth referred to the exact objectification of clearly expressed feeling.

#### FAR-REACHING IMPLICATIONS

The emotional features of Ruskin's esthetics led to the esthetic difficulties which arise from the theories of Veron and Tolstoy at the end of the century. Veron defined art as "*L'expression émue de la personnalité humaine*," literally, the moved expression of human personality. Tolstoy, on the other hand, though he recognized the emotional character of the language which he held art to be, still considered it communicative rather than expressive, and argued for the ideal kind of "Transmission of emotion" that would convey religious feeling and stimulate moral states of mind. Ruskin's theory, therefore, in its "Truth doctrines" and "Ideas of Relation" is suggestive of Tolstoy's but in the theories of "Imagination" and "Power" of Veron's position.

But in his whole theory Ruskin proceeds beyond Veron and Tolstoy, he even suggests a very lately published theory by J. C. Ducasse. In *The Philosophy of Art* Ducasse takes striking issue with Croce, Santayana and others on the meaning of expression, and with Dewey on the issue of "expression" versus "communication." He relies upon an emotionist theory of contemplation for fine art—more philosophical, of course, than Ruskin's; and he divides art which is "the language of emotion," into skilled work, skilled play and skilled self-objectification.

The resemblance to the much more simple views of Ruskin is interesting if not theoretically close.

But there is more evidence for considering Ruskin suggestive of the "instrumentalism" of Dewey. His very attempt to humanize art, his insistence in the first and fourth parts of his theory upon the communicative end, and his emphasis during the middle years of his life upon the social value of art—these suggest the modern theory of art as a language the significance of which is its "co-operation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership" <sup>4</sup> During these middle years, moreover, it is clear that Ruskin regards the chief value of art to consist in its creative impulse. It was the highest type of work

But the creative impulse was never to be indulged for the mere pleasure, it implied a purpose. When he wrote concerning this he thought less of the purely fine arts than the useful, yet, even in his first discussions of "fine" arts (1843-47), he attempted to supply this kind of end by declaring that art should serve the greater glory of God. The value thus lay, it seemed to him, first in the direction of the artistic activity toward a "useful" (in his, not the Utilitarian sense) end; secondly, in the fact that artistic activity itself was, at the same time, a good way of life. That, for Ruskin, is the prime urgency, almost the necessity of art.

The fact that the impulse to "create" (he disliked the word) is energy which in itself is pure, and is given form and direction by its end, is one side of the secret of art's value; the other side, is the fact that the imaginative act is in itself a means in more than the mere existential sense: it is *the* means to real life as distinct from bestial existence. In this sense it contains or creates its end. Now this seems very near to what Dewey is defining in a

much more intricate philosophical theory; his instrumentality has been given a full metaphysical basis, something which Ruskin's *art as a means* completely lacked. But the relation of means and end is similar even though the theories are on very different levels.

In conclusion, then, Ruskin's theory remains contradictory but historically important because of the unsettled questions which it stimulates. It is the first important theory in England to humanize or socialize art, it is also the first to emphasize true impressions rather than formal beauty as a primary concern, and thus to break the traditional bonds of beauty worship and extend art to the wider and so-called realistic range of experience. It was, moreover, the first modern emotionalist theory in England to imply in one central portion, the "expressionistic" end of emotional language. Its psychological assumptions, however, were rudimentary, still, Ruskin achieved a concept of "adjustment" in his theory of the development of taste in sensual pleasure, and he also admitted, in his criticism of Alison, what he considered to be the great importance of unconscious emotional associations, now so elaborately used by Parker on the one hand, and the Gestalt school on the other.

Finally, Ruskin's is the first theory that I know of to suggest that in the activity of art itself there lay the ultimate social value, the means to the end of good living. He did not merely relate art more closely to living than former theorists, but suggested that art was itself a good life. This was his genuinely modern contribution and this was the radical difference of his theory from all those preceding his which relegated art to pleasant but secondary ornamentations or esoteric elaborations of living.

The critic of an art isolated from the so-called mundane interests of life cannot admit moral considerations

in any of the objects he beholds. He can discuss art only in terms of form, color and technique or emotional abstractions which attempt to deny their moral roots. The art and the criticism which are now referred to as modern have the virtue of avoiding the moral limitations which characterized Ruskinism, but they are even more than Victorian painting and criticism the expression of moral confusion; they might be said to indicate ethical bankruptcy.

The implications of Ruskin's esthetics, however, reach beyond the quaint outlines of Victorian theology and propriety, even beyond their author's prejudices. They are not without possible application to twentieth century conditions, but if one followed their direction he would find himself justifying activities quite different from those which today fill the showrooms of dealers in fine art. For Ruskin's principles demand that the artist shall accept the good and the bad in daily life, that he shall discover beauty there, that he shall use every instrument which the inventive energy of man supplies to "convey" his vision and render his art "serviceable."

Now in spite of Ruskin's prejudice there is no contradiction of the gospel of work in the acceptance of machinery. Industrialism imposes a far greater demand for artists than does handcraft. The instruments of artistic work, however, are radically altered: the artist becomes the inventor, engineer, mechanic, designer, stylist, mural sculptor and painter; his art takes on a practical relation to his industrial fellow beings. However inadequate, therefore, his ideals become more immediately relevant to the ethical pretensions of his society. The more fine his art is, the more fully may it express his personality while it reveals the enthusiasms of his generation.

The Victorian prejudice against machinery and the continuation of illusions concerning the importance of

the individual prevented the gradual realization of Ruskin's views. The artist who could not accept the machine (and he has been legion) had to adapt himself to the caprice of a gentry with whom he could not live. Revolt- ing against the conventions of gentility and the tabus of an unthinkingly accepted code, he did, in the last decades of the previous century, achieve a certain glamour. But his position became unsocial, his motives unethical, his security increasingly precarious. Either he convinces the rich, today, that his fabrications are interesting or he starves, and even if he does convince them with the aid of middlemen, he lives upon the profits of those whose values he does not accept, whose instruments of success he does not understand.

It may be, then, that Ruskin's emphasis upon moral values in art holds a specific importance for the twentieth century. In an industrial civilization, where the machine has lifted from men's hands the pleasurable burden of making things, art may remain the only adequate medium for the realization of personality. To such a world Ruskin's theory has precise relevance: not only does it relate art objects to the moral values of daily life, but it centralizes an ethical principle in revealing art as the best possible kind of work. For the heart of Ruskinism lies in understanding art to be, not the escape from, but the way to life.

Among the modern works on esthetics listed at the close of Part I, Chapter IV above, I am indebted here particularly to the following:

BUERMEYER, L. *The Aesthetic Experience*. Merion Pa. 1924.

DUCASSE, J. *The Philosophy of Art*. N. Y. 1929.

RICHARDS, I. A. *The Principles of Literary Criticism*. N. Y.

• 1925

SANTAYANA, J. *The Sense of Beauty*. N. Y. 1896.

STEIN, L. *The A-B-C of Aesthetics*. N. Y. 1927.





## NOTES



## PART I

### NOTES TO CHAPTER I—EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TRADITIONS

1 "pictures" Some of the best of these are John Elsinn's *The Art of Painting after the Italian Manner*, 1704, Thomas Page's *The Art of Painting in its Rudiments*, 1720, Charles LeMotte's *Essay on Poetry and Painting with Relation to Sacred and Profane History*, the title of which itself illustrates the importance of religious and classical subject matter

2 "poem" A poem on painting, *De Arte Graphica*, written in the middle of the seventeenth century by Charles Alphonse Du Fresnoy, it was widely read and remained an authority along with the work of Lomazzo, to whom Hogarth refers, and Giovanni P. Bellori,—a neo-Platonist, whom Dryden quotes in his preface and his notes It was again translated by John Wright (1728) and by William Mason (1781) with notes by Reynolds

3 "formulae" Richardson divided the so-called "elements of the art" differently than did Du Piles he made seven instead of three "parts" of painting

4 "theory" such as appear in the theories of Du Fresnoy and Bellori, to which Reynolds refers in Discourse III Bellori held the doctrine of the Ideal Form of things See Hussey, Chris pp 52-3

5 "Inanimate" see Ladd, H A, *With Eyes of the Past*, N Y, 1928, p 37 for fuller account

6 "authority" The doctrine "ut pictura poesis" was very popular, Horace, Simonides and others were the principal authorities The French critics from Du Bos to Fenelon seemed to favor the idea, in England, Du Fresnoy, Dryden, Richardson, Webb, La Motte and others all foster the opinion that "Painting is a mute poetry, and poetry a speaking picture" For an excellent account of this comparison of the arts, see Manwaring, E, pp 19-24

7 "classic" Eigerman, H, *Alexander Pope & 18th Century Taste* Dissertation for M A 1932, unpublished, Columbia University Library

8 "esthetics" Hume's esthetic notions are explicit though they are scattered through many essays, they indicate a sharp departure from formalism on the one hand, and on the other, from the pre-

vailing neo-Platonism in the literary and esthetic criticism of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. He declares candidly that beauty cannot be defined, but can be discerned only by taste or sensation. It lies in experience rather than in the objective world. Pain and pleasure constitute not only the necessary attendants of beauty but its very essence. This is the opposite extreme from the notions of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson who, after Plotinus, are emphasizing the intellectual character of beauty. The question is thus transferred by Hume from an abstract or objective beauty to the nature of the psychological faculty taste. What constitutes taste and how far is it intellectual? Hume's analysis is complex, but, briefly stated, bases taste on merely emotional discriminations or feeling. These have reference, however, to objective or structural forms on the one hand, and to notions of utility or possessive interest on the other. Taste is not identified with, but definitely distinguished from, possessive interest and given a certain objective content by reference to structural forms. Beauty is not merely a quality productive of pleasure and pain, but a particular kind of experience.

9 "refers" Burke mentions the *Critical Reflections on Poetry, Painting and Music* by the Abbé du Bos (translated by Thos Nugent Gent from the fifth edition, 1748), but according to A Lombard (*L'Abbé du Bos, Thèse*, Paris, 1913, pp. 237-8) he did not acknowledge the influence of this earlier writer sufficiently to justify his borrowings.

There seems indeed to be a strong similarity between the two works but the Abbé's treatise is far more profound in its empirical implications. He protests that rules are not to be dogmatized or founded on the study of absolute beauty (see Lombard, Livre I, Ch. III, p. 232) and he goes so far as to insist that the value of a work of art rests only in the emotions (Lombard, Livre II, Ch. I). In the third chapter of the English translation of du Bos the term "passions" is used to indicate, evidently, the non-intellectual character of art's appeal. "The principal merit of poems and pictures consists in the imitation of such subjects, as would have excited real passions within us", though the passions which the objects of art actually excite are declared in comparison to be "superficial".

Burke, as well as Hogarth and Alexander Gerard, may also have been slightly influenced by the *Traité du Beau* of J. P. de Crousaz, which, though not exploiting sensation to the degree of the *Critical Reflections* of du Bos, does divide Beauty into ideas and sentiments. Ideas are specifically described as *formal* or as forms, con-

cepts and sentiments as sensual (See edition nouvelle, Paris, 1724, Ch II, *Idée général du Beau*, pp 11-12 ) The sentiments, Crousaz observes, are partly stimulated by external objects and partly by "dispositions intérieures qui ne sont pas en notre puissance "

Crousaz however, is predominantly a formalist discussing the ideas of unity, variety and proportion and the various types of Beauty of Science, of Virtue, of Eloquence and of Religion, adding also a commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*

10 "weaknesses" In brief, Burke distinguishes two sorts of passions those concerned with Self-Preservation, and those which he calls Social Upon the first, which may produce or be stimulated by ideas of pain and fear, he bases the experience of the Sublime, upon the second, which includes the various manifestations of love, from lust to noble human regard, with their complex associations, he bases the experience he calls Beauty Beauty and the Sublime are separate, but co-ordinate experiences, and their elements are often opposite He is very careful to avoid a literally sexual explanation for Beauty Lust, for example, is a passion which belongs to generation merely, as in animals

Nevertheless, beauty is defined objectively as "some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses" (Section XII), and the sublime "is an idea belonging to self preservation the most affecting we have its strongest emotion is an emotion of distress no pleasure from a positive cause belongs to it" (Section XXII)

The most obvious weakness in all this is that, part of the time, Burke seems to believe that the sensations themselves are a cause of the experiences of the sublime and the beautiful, and part of the time they appear to be the constituents The relations of the experience of beauty to objective formal elements in nature or in art is not so clear as that given by Hume or du Bos and becomes confused by feelings that are often called ideas or objective qualities This is particularly true as Burke tries to avoid the materialistic implications of a sexual theory It would be difficult to keep ideas of social value or personal quality merely sensational

In Section XV, after insisting that our delight in tragedy on the stage does not consist in the fact of its being a deceit, he illustrates by suggesting how people would turn from a mere representation to a real hanging, if one were close at hand He avers, however, that calamity must not come to us ourselves, if we are to preserve the mixed pleasure-pain of sublime experience "We delight in feeling things, which so far from doing, our heartiest wishes would

see redressed" He offers no real explanation for the fact of this delight, he merely states it (Section XIV) "And all this antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes without our concurrence"

The mixed pain-pleasure which the viewing of calamity or tragedy affords us is one of the points which Burke's psychology was at a loss to explain Payne Knight saw this and, though he offered no real constructive explanation, made the issue one of the chief features in his attack upon Burke See Hussey, pp 80-81

11 "Dennis" See note 10, Part I, Ch VI, below

12 "representation" Burke accepts only in part Aristotle's theory that we delight in the skill of the imitation This applies, Burke thinks, to subjects, "such as we could have no desire of seeing in reality" "But," he says, "when the object of a painting or a poem is such as we would run to see if real that power of the poem or picture is more owing to the nature of the thing itself, than to the mere effect of imitation, or to a consideration of the skill of the imitator, however excellent" (Part I, Section XVI, also first paragraph of Section XV)

13 "disproportion" For the discussion of Joshua Reynolds in text see *Discourses*, London, Froude, 1907, Discourse III (Nature and Imitation), VIII (reference Burke's treatise), Discourse XII (views on education), Discourse III (historical painting and invention), Discourses III and XVIII ("the general idea" or "la belle nature," imagination)

14 "Rymer" See *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Joel Spingarn, Oxford, 1908, Introduction, pp lxvii-lxx, where Spingarn observes that the concept of nature in Rymer's essays is based upon the mechanized universe of Hobbes and Locke, and where he also points to the interesting fact that Pope's "Nature still but nature methodized" comes originally from Rapin and that "Dryden and Dennis accept it as implicitly as Pope"

In Rymer's *Short View of Tragedy*, moreover, the theory that pleasure is the chief end of poetry is combined with the didactic function of poetry ("The End of all is to show Virtue in Triumph") much as the two notions of pleasure and instruction are combined in the doctrine of Reynolds

15 "association" These theories of association arose, so far as I can determine, from the theories of knowledge in Locke and Hume, from the importance which Shaftesbury and Hutcheson gave to sense perception and particularly from the emphasis upon sensation in the French esthetics of Du Bos and Crousaz

16 "Shaftesbury" Antony A Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury—1671-1713—*Inquiry Concerning Virtue* (1699), *Characteristics of Men and Plastics*—begun publication 1711 He has been said to be "the possible originator of the phrase 'moral sense' in its philosophical signification" (Dictionary of National Biography)

For Shaftesbury's esthetic notions see Bosanquet, London, 1917, pp 177-8 And for a discussion of this theory in relation to the vogue of the picturesque in England see Hussey, p 53

17 "Hutcheson" Francis Hutcheson—1694-1746—*Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Order* was published while he was professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow 1729-46 His *System of Moral Philosophy* was published by his son Francis in 1755

For discussion of this theory as related to The Picturesque, The Sublime and The Beautiful, see Bosanquet, p 177, and Hussey, pp 54-5

18 "1796" The theory contained in Mengs' *Reflections* is Plotinian Perfection lies in God only There is an appearance of perfect reason in the natural world and it is this which art must capture Art must, through apprehension of the *pure forms* in the world, express what we call beauty which is the visible imprint of the Divine idea on the natural world Beauty is thus derived from the uniformity of matter with ideas, but derived symbolically, these ideas arise from our experience and from our intellectual speculation upon the destination which the divine Wisdom has bestowed upon all things

19 "lectures" For the lectures of Barry Opie and Fuseli, see *Lectures of the Royal Academicians*, edit R N Wornum, London, 1848

20 "art." Opie's combination of realistic and ideal arguments is an individual confusion but by no means new It was characteristic of the writings of the Scotch common sense school which drew attention to the elements of feeling or sensation, yet offered a neo-platonic explanation of the good and the beautiful A similar dualism is later illustrated in the *Essay on Taste* by Alexander Gerard

Gerard's *An Essay on Taste*, Edinb, 1759, was submitted to the Edinburgh Society in 1759 winning a prize, and published 1759 Gerard had read John Baillie's *Essay on the Sublime* and the French works of Crousaz and Du Bos He may be considered as an important forerunner of Alison in that he does suggest a theory of association both in respect to explaining the beauty of colors (see p 43) and the connection of taste with "the passions" (see p 197)

Gerard, however, is an eclectic difficult to characterize. He begins by following Hutcheson in referring to "the powers of imagination," called "internal or reflex senses" (see p 13), to explain one half of the origin of taste. The other half seems to be made up of association and conscious effort of the will to cultivate (see p 1) for "the moral sense itself" is "a taste of a superior order" which "renders morality the chief requisite" of art and genius (See Chapter VII, p 74).

When Gerard comes to an analysis of beauty itself or "the sense of Beauty," his work is a very amusing muddle of Longinus, Hogarth, Du Fresnoy, and Crousaz, from all of whom he quotes (See Ch III). His psychology is rudimentary and in line with the typical doctrine of the faculties. The Imagination holds a "middle rank between the bodily senses and the rational and moral faculties" (See p 159).

## PART I

### NOTES TO CHAPTER II—RUSKIN AND TRADITION

#### *Note*

The paraphrase of Ruskin's discussion of the five *Ideas* in this chapter is based on *Modern Painters*, Vol I, Part I, Sect I, "Of the Nature Of The Ideas Conveyable By Art," Chapters I-VII inc, Wks, 3. Specific references to these chapters have been omitted.

1 "art" Ruskin in this argument is opposing the theories of Fuseli who had considerable reputation as a critic among men of the generation of Ruskin's father. Fuseli, however, was no competent theorist. In his lectures (III and IV) he uses the term imitation in the literal sense of copy, follows Aristotle's explanation of delight in skill, and then turns about to argue an idealistic meaning into "imitation" by laying down rules for the proper content to imitate. Fuseli's epigrammatic style may have had a good deal to do with Ruskin's irritation.

2 "anything" A prudent generalization often forgotten in his later writing.

3 "tradition" Not a truly Platonic formula. Plato conceived art as third-hand when he considered its general significance, its comparative reality in our experience. Reason, not art, for Plato,



reached the Real But in Book III of *The Republic*, Plato does imply that the arts can embody spiritual ideas in sensuous form, and, of course, the temper of the *Phaedrus* suggests a profound recognition of the spiritual significance of art, though not, in spite of the metaphor of the soul-chariot, on the basis of an artistic symbolism Ruskin was first familiar, as he says in *Praeterita*, with the *Phaedrus*, later, with *The Republic*

## PART I

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III—NEW THEORIES FOR A NEW PUBLIC

1 "emotion" See Fairchild, p 245

2 "criticism" See *An Inquiry into the Causes which have Obstructed the Progress in the Fine Arts in England* (1774) Barry laid the obstruction of progress to the superficiality of the patrons of the arts and to the slavish reverence for ancient art characteristic of the ignorant gentry and the hypocritical connoisseur He also called attention to archeological facts in his *Paintings at Adelphe* with the implication that many who pretended to judge classical art would forthwith have to reform their knowledge of its history His *Letter to the Dilettante Society* attacked ignorance and incompetence so directly that his membership in the Academy was rescinded

3 "origin" Clarke mentions (pp 134-5) Seroux d'Agincourt's history, "The first to describe painting before Raphael" (*Histoire de l'Art*, Paris, 1823), De Montor's "Description of Fourteenth Century Paintings" published 1808, 1811, 1825 and with illustrations in 1818, and Wm Young Ottley's "Italian School of Design (Part I, 1805, II, 1813, III, 1823—published London) which contained the description of some Giotto's Clarke's citation of architectural studies before 1800 is too long for quotation (see pp 84-88) but one has his valuable research as evidence of the craze for Gothic archeology from 1800-1820 The more authoritative architectural histories, however, appear after this date

4 "England" Other notable works between 1845-60 were Lindsay's *History of Christian Art* (reviewed by Ruskin, 1847), Mrs Jameson's immensely popular *Memoirs of Early Italian Painters* (1845), Eastlake's *History of Oil Painting* (1847), and *Contributions to the History of the Fine Arts* (1848) Several famous translations such as Lanzi's *Luminaries of Painting* (1848), Kugler's

*Handbook* (1851), and Dr Waagan's records of *Treasures of Art in Great Britam* (1854-57) were all important influences upon criticism. These led finally to Crowe and Cavalcaselle's *History of Early French Painters* in 1857 and their subsequent histories of Dutch and Italian schools.

5 "century" See Du Bos, *Critical Reflections*, London, 1748, Chapters XIII-XX, Vol II, which argue that physical causes (conditions of air and climate) have a share in the progress of art, rather than moral causes.

6 "copies" See Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Correspondence and Table Talk*, ed by F Wordsworth Haydon, two volumes, London, 1878 I, pp 38 seq., and "Official Correspondence" For his complaint, see I, pp 385-88.

7 "workmen" Haydon lectured in many cities and attempted to found schools of art in Newcastle, Hull, Sheffield and other towns (see same, I, pp 409-12 and p 418). He hoped to establish by this propaganda "a union of artists and mechanics" which would enrich manufacture (I, pp 397-8, 256 and 429-30). There was a genuine social ideal here more nearly in line with the coming temper of industry than any that Carlyle or Ruskin held at a later period. But Haydon was too eccentric and essentially too unfamiliar with machine craft and commercial production to make successful practical applications.

8. "attitudes" See Hazlitt, Wm., *Essays on Art*, ed by Wm Carew Hazlitt, London, 1873. See also *Table Talk* and *The Plain Speaker*, ed by the same.

9 "bold" The abusive document was called the *Catalogue Raisonné*. Hazlitt's criticism appeared in *The Examiner*, p 697 (1816). Hazlitt had said, "the Academicians hereby avow, their rankling jealousy, hatred, and scorn of all Art, and the great names in Art, and require the keeping down the public taste as the only way to keep up the bubble of their reputation." Quoted by B. R. Haydon. See *Memoirs and Autobiography*, ed Tom Taylor and Aldous Huxley, London, 1926, Vol I, pp 262-3.

10 "period" Haydon's views on art comprise an enthusiasm for nature which is not at all within the idealistic tradition (See *Correspondence and Table Talk*, I, p 38 seq. and p 257). He believes in naturalistic imitation, yet reaches for spiritual sanction by a revived eighteenth century classicism. God is revealed not through any "beau-ideal" in art, but through "the laws of Nature" to be observed (strangely enough) in Greek art, particularly that of Phidias who "restored to each object the essential qualities given

by God" (same, I, pp 324-5) He stood against an inspirational theory of genius and believed in technical discipline to train men to *copy nature* minutely (I, pp 283-4) He considered that the end of art was not "to please," as Payne Knight affirmed, but "to instruct by pleasing" (I, p 59) In short, Haydon was a reactionary Academician of the type which Ruskin later condemned For "Elgin Marbles" see same I, p 255, also "Letters" to Lord Elgin, Sir Robert Peel, and Payne Knight and others For letters on anatomical study see same, "Letter to Wordsworth" in which Haydon speaks of his two years' drawing and dissecting (II, p 52) and, in a letter to Lord Leveson Gower (I, pp 376-7) where he says "I drew and dissected . . . 'knife in hand' for two years before I touched a brush" Among the Italians Haydon admires Giotto particularly (same, I, pp 350 and 377) His correspondence with satellites is little short of amazing—Goethe, Wagner, Canova and David are among his continental correspondents and in England he wrote much to Wordsworth and to Keats, to Sir Walter Scott and Tom Moore, to Southey, Leigh Hunt, Cowper, Lockhart, Mrs Siddons and Elizabeth Barrett

11 "classes" Clarke, p 114 For the preceding discussion see same, Chaps V and VI

12 "trees" Clarke, pp 142-45

13 "generation" The revolts of Blake and Wordsworth against artistic and poetic conventions are well known, but the contributions of William Combe are less a matter of common knowledge The *Tour of Dr Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* (1812) cruelly satirizes the artificial doctrines of Wm Gulpin, the most famous doctrinaire of the formalized informality in landscape

14 "pantheism" Brinton, p 221

15 "splendour" See Manwaring, Chap I

16 "tramp" The "tramp" fashion, however, appears to have begun in the late seventeenth century with Wenscelas Hollar who came to England from Prague (See Hind, pp 226-30)

17 "landscape" See Armstrong, pp 209-10, where it is also said that "landscape in the more orthodox sense" (meaning our sense) "was utterly neglected."

18 "Gainsborough" See Hazlitt, William *Essays on the Fine Arts*, ed 1876, by W Carew Hazlitt, p 172 and p 391 See also the essay "On the Fine Arts" in which Hazlitt admires Gainsborough's early work and condemns his later pictures as "fimsy caricatures of Rubens" These he compared "to bad water color drawings" (pp 243-4)

19 "Barry" Barry admired pastoral and simple scenes of Berchem, Claude Geleé, Swaneveld, and a few other notaries (*Lectures of the Royal Academicians*, R N Wornum, London, 1848, p 449 and note by editor)

20 "painting" One should also mention the Sandby brothers, Paul and Thomas, to whom Miss Manwaring refers in her chapter VIII as important landscapists These men, Thomas an architectural designer and Paul a painter, were followers to some extent of the early watercolorists, Cozens and Scott (See Hind, p 226)

They were, however, well within the respectable tradition of taste—the admiration of Claude and Salvator etc which Miss Manwaring is describing Paul was even a drawing master to the Royal children They are not therefore typical of the new group of painters who, by their very lack of conventional training, bring about the new landscape

21 "tints." See Manwaring, E, pp 171-5, where the "artistic proclivities" of such as Lady Hertford, Mrs Montague, Mrs Delany and Mrs Carter are cited as evidence of the various forms of an amusing artistic fashion

22 "flowers" See, for example *Remarks on Landscape Painting in Water Colors, Principals of Effect and Color as Applied to Landscape Painting*, by G F Phillips, 1833, *Lessons in Flower Painting*, by James Andrews, 1835, and *An Essay on the Education of the Eye With Reference to Painting*, by John Burnet, 2nd Edition, 1837.

23 "Norwich" John Crome (1769-1821) received little or no education, was apprenticed to a coach, house and sign painter and later made his living by teaching drawing. He may have sold sketches to a local print dealer He took his pupils into the country to draw direct from nature (See Smith, p 238, and Holme, pp 8-12)

24 "drawing" Cotman (1782-1842), instead of imitating Crome, branched out into a definitely independent style (See Smith, p 239, and Holme, p 17) Cotman drew direct from nature at an early age, he made his first drawings of ruins and churches in villages About 1800 he came to London and was one of a group who used to go to the home of Dr Munro, a collector of drawings and minor patron, to draw and converse in the evenings There he probably met Girtin and Turner He seems to have possessed some independent income.

25 "oils" Constable (1776-1851) was painting at fifteen, more or less under the direction of John Dunthorn, a resident of his

Suffolk village, but for sometime worked at other pursuits. He went to London when twenty-two to begin his formal training in the Royal Academy. Joseph Farington and Sir George Beaumont were interested in him, but it was not Beaumont's style which influenced him. See also Kaines Smith, p. 241, and particularly for letters and descriptive material in Constable's life and period, C. R. Leslie's biography. It is apparent that Constable admired Claude and, as a young man beginning his career in the Academy, even tried to paint classical pieces. But like Turner he soon gave up this practice and returned to his earlier model, nature (See Lucas.)

26 "firms" Girtin was apprenticed to William Days, a landscape draftsman, and Turner was apprenticed to Thomas Moulton, an architectural draftsman (Smith, p. 239, also Hamerton.) Both young men, according to the latter, also studied together in the home of Dr. Munro, the collector of landscape drawings. In Dr. Munro's collection were drawings of Canaletto and Cozens which are said to have possibly influenced Turner at this time (See also Thornbury, and Knight.)

According to Townsend, Turner was employed as a boy to color prints for John Raphael Smith, the mezzotint engraver, who recommended that he should take up architecture. He seems to have added background to architects' drawings for Mr. Pordon and Mr. Hardwick. He entered the latter's office in 1789, the same year he began at the Academy Schools.

27 "oil" See Hazlitt, *Essays on Fine Art*, p. 67.

28 "butter" Their recognition, it must be noted, was comparatively slow in coming. Constable's and Turner's connection with the Academy aided in establishing their reputation. Cotman seems to have sold some water colors through a London dealer named Thistle and later through Ackerman. But in 1832 when Allan Cunningham published *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters and Sculptors*, there was in his three volumes no mention of these new artists. This is interesting because landscape had by this time become very popular. Wilson, whom Hazlitt had only moderately regarded, is by Cunningham considered of importance and praised warmly (p. 183.)

## PART I

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV—THE CASE FOR TRUTH

*Note*

The paraphrase of Ruskin's discussion of "Ideas of Truth" and the esthetic problem of representation is based upon *Modern Painters*, I, Sect I, "General Principles Respecting Ideas of Truth," Chapters I-VI inc (Wks 3, pp 133-164), and *Modern Painters*, III, Part IV, Chapter VII, "Of the True Ideal—Naturalist" (Wks 5, pp 111-129). A number of quotations and opinions have also been taken from the Fourth Oxford Lecture, on "The Relation of Art to Use" (Wks 20, pp 95-118 particularly). An application of these opinions to Pre-Raphaelite paintings is to be found in Wks 12, pp 140-150. All the above references are omitted. Quotations from and references to other volumes are listed below.

1. "himself" Reynolds, *Discourses* (III)
2. "facts." Wks 7, 203
3. "Coleridge" *Biographia literaria*, Ed Shawcross, Oxford, 1907. See v, ii, p 256, where Coleridge inveighs against the literal copying of nature "whilst, in respect to a work of genuine imitation, you begin with an acknowledged total difference, and then every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of an approximation of truth"
4. "rose" Wks 4, 56, From the chapter entitled "Of Accuracy and Inaccuracy in Impressions of Sense"
5. "art" These and other statements through Ruskin's writing are consistent with his actual practice in teaching students to draw, where he avoided, as much as possible, any rules for the correct procedure and referred the student in each case to the model before him. The draughtsman who drew by rule Ruskin contemptuously called "the scientific draughtsman" and declared that because he trusted rules instead of his observations he got about one third of nature. Ruskin's careful reading of Reynolds' discourses led him at an early age to the conviction that "The only way to ascertain the ultimate truth in such matters is to look for it"
6. "now" These observations emphasize the senses as the basis of truth, they prove that Ruskin formulated an important part of the theory later developed by the Impressionists. Ruskin had thor-

oughly digested Locke's observation on the influence of habit in matters of judgment, even of perception, he saw only too clearly how easy it is for the mind to "take the sign," as Locke puts it, for the object, or, as Ogden in his *Meaning of Meaning* has pointed out, to cut short the process of reference in thought, jumping from the sign to the object, instead of referring back through the "idea of the object" to the object

Ruskin in this connection also points to the fact that bad or merely imitative art—the variety that is often sentimentally popular—relies on mere recognition, rather than real perception, and is very far from truth. This explanation of the sentimental is close to Richard's explanation in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*. Ruskin was reaching for a psychological distinction that was beyond the science of his age.

Representation involves "the higher sensibility", recognition an average degree of accuracy, merely of the senses. The connection between higher and lower sensibility in artistic representation Ruskin describes on the basis of Plato's myth in the *Phaedrus*, the sharpness of the purely physical sensibility is not emphasized. Yet one would guess that Plato's influence is merely superficial, especially as the debt to the pages of Locke is obvious. Ruskin, so far as I can tell, never read Aristotle's *De Anima*, nor had he any idea of patterning this relation of higher and lower sensibilities on Aristotle's theory of the identification of the form, in the sense agent, with the form in the object. Neither had he read Coleridge's discussions of this problem in the *Biographia literaria*, where the senses are distinguished similarly and the metaphysical relation of the self to the object is explained. Ruskin is unacquainted with the Aristotelian or the modern German psychology which, however rational, might have been useful to him.

Ruskin's want of psychology is detrimental to his theory, for there is no exact account given of the relation of the sensuous to the contemplative faculty, nor of both faculties to the intellect. Nor is there any traditional distinction between active and passive intellect which might have served Ruskin to distinguish between contemplation on the one hand and imagination on the other. He leaves such relationships naive.

7 "before" Ruskin quotes Locke, Book II, Chaps. 8 and 21.

8 "derived" Ruskin in his early writing goes farther than Reynolds in this assumption, believing not only that nature was more beautiful than any work of man, but that she was entirely beautiful and could not be improved upon. This extreme view, a result of

his enthusiasm for the naturalist cause, was in direct clash with Reynolds. But in 1883 Ruskin notes in revising the second volume of *Modern Painters* that this generalization is pretentious and unsound.

9 "tradition" Ruskin does not emphasize, as did Reynolds in *The Idler*, the process of inclination toward or progress to the ideal. He does not seem to mean that each individual progresses toward its ideal but that each individual is illustrative of certain differing degrees of nearness to the ideal. Yet the world for both Reynolds and Ruskin was essentially a static and mechanical universe, however spiritualized the mechanism might be thought to be.

10. "bulk" See Bosanquet, p. 311 (Goethe & Hirt), p. 328 (Schelling), and p. 453 seq. (general discussion).

11 "fact" It is quite true that he relinquishes this emphasis in his discussions of religious art in the second volume of *Modern Painters* and occasionally in the architectural criticisms, but many of these earlier indiscretions he cancels by notes of a later date, all of which are given by Cook and Wedderburn in their standard edition.

12 "heart" (Wks. 5, 127-8) Note in this passage the latent assumption that a moral order underlies all human nature—that a rogue in one century equals a rogue in another—that a "complete portrait" can be drawn only because it is "down to the heart which is the same in all ages." Ruskin's mysticism here does not lie in his esthetics but in his moral assumptions, and in these, as I shall show, he is hopelessly confused.

13 "beautiful" See Bosanquet, Chap. IV, and concerning Ruskin, p. 4, also p. 448 where it is said that Ruskin gains over Goethe, Hegel and Schelling in emphasizing not "the individual" but the particular natural facts in their importance to art.

14 "implications" This notion appears in Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty*, in Buermeier's *The Aesthetic Experience*, and most strikingly in Leo Stein's *A-B-C of Aesthetics*. In all these writers there seems to be a general agreement as to the distinction between the kind of knowing which is art and that which is science.

15 "denied" In corrections added later—see editions 1879 and 1883.

16 "consists" See Hazlitt, Wm., *Essays on the Fine Arts*, edit. W. Carew Hazlitt, London, 1873, essay entitled "On Originality," pp. 120-122 particularly.

17 "Reality" Wks. 12, 163.



## PART I

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V—COMPLEX TRADITIONS, ETC

1 "century" *The Familiar Letters of James Howell* (Historiographer Royal to Charles II), ed J Jacobs, London, 1892

2 "views" See Elton, v 1, p 422 Scott's article was published in the *Westminster Review*, March, 1828

3 "piece" See Du Bos, 1st English ed (from the 5th of Du Bos), London, 1748, v 1, p 1

4 "Payne Knight" See Hussey, pp 69-81 Knight differs with Price after 1800 as to what good taste should imply He replies in 1805 to Price's essay of 1801 He is interested in making the doctrine of picturesque landscape less formalistic and definitely more impressionistic or poetical than Price Turner's early work, for example, would have satisfied Price but his later work would have illustrated the tendency of Knight's principles It would scarcely have been possible, however, that Knight, even had he seen Turner's later pictures, could have approved of them Theory and paint are forever separate worlds

5 "curiosity" See Lauder, Sir Thos D, *Price on The Picturesque, An Essay on the Origin of Taste*, London, 1842, p 69 For following discussion and quotation see pp 82, 95, and 111 respectively

6 "William Gulpin" See Gulpin, Wm, *Five Essays on Picturesque Subjects*, London, 1808, p 123

7 "effect" See Stewart, Dugald, *Works*, edited by Hamilton, London, 1877, *Essay on The Beautiful* Stewart's *Elements of Philosophy of the Human Mind* had been published in 1792 Alison had studied under him at Edinburgh and dedicated the *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* to Stewart

8 "thought" See Alison, Archibald, *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste*, London, 1819, "Essay I," conclusion

9 "unconscious" For summary of this classification see Alison, *Essays, etc*, the conclusion to "Essay III" The first group contains emotional associations which are covered by the adjectives, "fitting" or "appropriate", these he calls associations from experience The second consists of associations produced by analogy or resemblance such as personifications and sentimental attributions, fears from and delights in what we would call symbolic objects The third class contains such associations as are formed by education or

training, or as Alison says, "Association in the proper sense of this term", nor need the education be formal, it may be powerful though it be accidental. The fourth and last group consists of associations out of our individual or private experience, which apply to our and no one else's lives. These are largely sentimental associations formed about certain colors or shapes, certain types of people and places. Into this class a modern psychologist would also read unconscious sexual prejudices and individual, conditioned reflexes.

10 "him." When Lauder concludes that "All sensations may be the foundation of the emotions of beauty" he does not mean even an emotional synthesis, he means *each* sensation may produce beauty or a *sum* of sensations. In answer to the second query he observes that "Almost every tie by which two objects can be bound together in the imagination, in such a manner that the presentment of the one shall recall the memory of the other" may constitute "the connexion" between beautiful objects and our affections. And this is adding nothing to Alison—or to Hume for that matter. But it is the extent of his psychological analysis. (See Lauder, pp. 5-8) (*Italics mine*.)

11 "taste." Lauder's classification of associations follows Alison's but is qualified by distinctions between the picturesque and the beautiful which are defined *a priori*, and conventionally. He reaches at the end of his essay a purely relative position in regard to taste, it depends, he admits, upon individual associations, but he attempts to establish a universal standard for beauty. Beauty is first personal, he says, yet it may be made universal "if the artist employs the natural signs or inseparable concomitants of emotions of which the greater part of mankind are susceptible" (p. 55). But he prefers to rely upon an aristocratic standard in preference to a universal. He thus recommends the study of those objects "capable of touching responsive chords of general association among the educated portions of mankind or the more cultivated caste."

12 "connotations." Fairchild, Chap. X, "The Religion of Nature."

13 "composition." See Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison* (2nd edit., Millar), London, 1759. For the quotations and paraphrase in text see pp. 30-54 particularly.

14 "dignity." See *Biographia literaria* edit. Shawcross, Oxford, 1907, v. 2, pp. 260-261.

15 "idea." same, "Essay on Poesy and Art," v. 2, p. 253. The formal or intellectual character of this idea may be gathered from

the following "Now so to place these images, totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,—this is the mystery of genius in the fine arts" (pp 257-258)

16 "idea" same, pp 254-255 Under the general term art Coleridge, however, carefully distinguishes poetry from the plastic "that they all, like poetry, are to express intellectual purposes, thoughts, conceptions, and sentiments which have their origin in the human mind, not, however, as poetry does, by means of articulate speech, but as nature or divine art does, by form, color, magnitude, proportion, or by sound, that is,—silently or musically" (p 255)

17 "things" same, v 1, Preface, lxxiv

18 "man" same, "Essay on Art," p 257

19 "symbols" same, Preface, lxxiv

20 "vital" same, "Essay on Poesy and Art," pp 256-7

21 "feeling" same, "Fragment of Essay on Beauty," p 251

22 "itself" same, "Essay on Poesy and Art," pp 258-60

23 "voice" Brinton, p 36

24 "Ethics" The influence of Aristotle on Ruskin cannot be doubted, but it would be untrue to say that Ruskin studied the *Ethics* with particular zeal while at college. The sparse marginal notes in his own copies prove this. See Wks 1, Introd, p xxv. On the other hand, to belittle for this reason the importance of the *Ethics* as a source of the principal idea in the theory of beauty would be equally gross.

25 "death" The second volume of *Modern Painters* bears witness to the fact that he felt this conviction as strongly in 1846 as he did in 1855 when he wrote this sentence in *Modern Painters* III, "Of the True Nature of Greatness of Style" (Wks 5, 45)

26 "theory" Indeed, these idealistic preconceptions antedate his more careful examination of sense experience, as the *Letters to a College Friend* in 1840 and 1841 prove conclusively.

27 "sensuality" The modern would probably prefer the term sensuous, but Ruskin prefers and uses sensual. The most explicit statement of his position in this regard is to be found in *Letters to a College Friend* (Wks 1, p 450). Ruskin has been attacking a certain group of psychological theories of beauty based on the principle of association. He explains that their origin is quite natural, for they are but vain efforts to answer the question why we derive

more pleasure from one object than another. He answers that he believes they are only secondarily or superficially true, he goes on to say "But you must have a good downright brutal instinct to begin with, or you never know where you are. God has said, 'You shall like this, and you shall dislike that,' and there is an end of the matter, it will be liked and disliked to all time, though all the associations in the world stood in array against the impulses. On these natural feelings one may set to work, one may teach, accustom, associate, and do a great deal to increase, diminish, or change, but the natural instinct is still the source of all."

Compare also the explicit statement in *Modern Painters* I, Chap VI, "Ideas of Beauty" (Wks 3, 109), that we receive pleasure from beautiful things without any knowing element "but instinctively and necessarily, as we derive sensual pleasure from the scent of a rose." See also the explanation of the relation of the "sensual basis" to higher emotion in *Modern Painters* II (Wks 4, 48)

28 "art." See Appendix to *Modern Painters* II (4, 365), the following from additional MS to *Modern Painters*: "All pure colors and multitudinous harmonies which may be produced by their association,—light as such, provided it be not oppressively light, and perhaps smoothness and signs of softness, in form—may be considered as producing, by their various combinations, a certain beauty in objects, pleasing to the eye only, and in no way addressing itself to mind, which I shall hereafter characterize by the term 'Sensual Beauty'."

For his denial see Wks 4, 142 " . . I must reiterate, with reference to modern narrowness or meanness of thought, that the pleasure of the eye is never to be confused with the blind and temporary instincts of the blood, and that, briefly, and always, a girl is praised because she is like a rose,—not a rose because it is like a girl."

And again, see Wks 4, 63 n (1883)

29 "taste" (Wks 4, 53; also 25, 45) "We are born to like or dislike certain aspects of things; nor could I, by any arguments, alter the defined tastes which you receive at your birth, and which the surrounding circumstances of life have enforced, without any possibility of your voluntary resistance to them" (Lecture II, Oxford, May 2, 1873)

30 "taste" See Wks 20, 36 " . . and it is only by music, literature, and painting, that cultivation can be given. Also, the faculties which are thus received are hereditary, so that the child of an educated race has an innate instinct for beauty, derived from arts practised hundreds of years before its birth."

31 "reason" Wks 15, 391—*Laws of Fésole*

32 "Aristocracy" There is no suggestion in any of these discussions of beauty and taste that Ruskin was influenced by Goethe. He did not read Goethe until some time after he had become intimate with Carlyle and then with much spluttering protest over the dullness of *Wilhelm Meister*. See Wks 5, 330 n (*Modern Painters* III, 1856, Part IV, Chap 16), where Ruskin classes Goethe with Balzac. In 1875 he added an explanatory note which gives briefly his opinion of Goethe and the fact of his delayed reading. He says "I knew nothing of Goethe when I compared him with Balzac, but the intolerable dullness which encumbers the depth of Wilhelm Meister, and the cruel reserve which conceals from all but the intensest readers the meaning of Faust, have made him, in a great degree, an evil influence in European literature, and evil is always second-rate."

See also 37, 278, and 34, 588 where Ruskin declares that Goethe was no good to anybody but Carlyle!

## PART I

### NOTES TO CHAPTER VI—THE PROBLEM OF BEAUTY

#### Note

The paraphrase of Ruskin's discussion of the lower and higher senses is based upon *Modern Painters* II, Part III, "Of Accuracy and Inaccuracy in Impressions of Sense" (Wks 4, 51-65). A few relevant quotations have also been drawn from the preceding chapter II "Of the Theoretic Faculty as Concerned with Pleasures of Sense" (pp 42-50). Detailed references to these pages have been omitted below.

Chapters I and II and XV in the same volume form the basis of my paraphrase of Ruskin's views on the "Theoretic or Contemplative Experience" (Wks 4, 25-50 and 208-18). References to these pages have also been omitted.

The paraphrase of Ruskin's refutation of "Popular Fallacies," of his discussion of the Sublime and the Picturesque, with their relevant quotations, are based upon *Modern Painters* II "Of False Opinions" (Wks 4, 66-75), *Modern Painters* I, Chapter III "Of the Sublime" (Wks 3, 128-30), and *Modern Painters* IV, Chapter I "Of the Turnerian Picturesque" (Wks,

6, 9-26) respectively The appendix to Wks 6 also holds some interesting material on "The Grottesque" (469 seq) All but a few of the most important references to these pages have been omitted

Other detailed references and quotations are listed below

1 "class" Wks 5, 103 seq, see also 10 (Stones of Venice), Ch 6 No 56 Also letter to Norton, Wks 26, 339, mentions his "depreciation of the Purist school and elevation of the material" he refers to Venetian painters not to utilitarian economists

2 "Creator" See Wks 4, 59 and 62 where this theological argument is again affirmed "Seeing then that these qualities of material objects which are calculated to give us this universal pleasure, are demonstrably constant in their address to human nature, they must belong in some measure to whatever has been esteemed beautiful throughout successive ages of the world, and they are also by their definition common to all the works of God" This seems a flat contradiction of the variability of human impressions of beauty, but it is not, for Ruskin is speaking here only of the most highly cultivated perception which can gain the experience of "universal pleasures" However, it is very shaky argument and rests upon the kind of universal assumption which is scarcely compatible with his empirical observations In 1883 he notes at this point in the text that he had not yet learned to judge rightly "even of taste" (p 59 n)

In 1, 425 Ruskin says that "the cultivation of this feeling for the beautiful" is to be achieved through the study of art

3 "another" Wks 4, 52 "Our first inquiry must evidently be, how we are authorized to affirm of any man's mind, that it is in a healthy state or otherwise, respecting the impressions of sight, and what canon or test there is by which we may determine of these impressions that they are not *rightly* esteemed beautiful For it does not at first appear easy to prove that men ought to like one thing rather than another, and although this is granted generally by men's speaking of 'bad' or 'good' taste, yet the right of individual opinion (sometimes claimed even in moral matters, though then palpably without foundation) does not appear altogether irrational in matters aesthetic, wherein little operation of voluntary choice is supposed possible"

4 "understanding" See *Biographia literaria*, "Fragment of Essay on Taste" (Shawcross edit), pp 247-9, where Coleridge says that the lower senses "combine with the perception of the outward ob-

ject of a distinct sense of our own life" and are therefore not purely "sentient" as the eye and ear but "mixed" "By taste," Coleridge further insists, "we must be supposed to mean an intellectual perception of any object blended with a distinct reference to our own sensibility of pain and pleasure" (p 248)

5 "psychology" In discussing the psychological divisions of human nature as made by Fergusson in *Principles of Beauty*, London, 1849, and in refuting their particular application to art, Ruskin gives his own classification which he calls *Divisions of Humanity*. He writes (9, 445) "Let us take some notice, therefore, in what degrees the faculties of man may be engaged in his several arts we may consider the entire man as made up of body, soul, and intellect. Then, taking the word soul as a short expression of the moral and responsible part of being, each of these three parts has a passive and active power. The body has senses and muscles, the soul, feeling and resolution, the intellect, understanding and imagination. The scheme may be put into tabular form, thus —

Passive or Receptive Part		Active or Motive Part
Body	Senses	Muscles
Soul	Feeling	Resolution
Intellect	Understanding	Imagination

In this scheme I consider memory a part of understanding, and conscience I leave out, as being the voice of God in the heart, inseparable from the system, yet not an essential part of it. The sense of beauty I consider a mixture of the Senses of the body and soul."

If this scheme is examined in reference to the theories of beauty including both the passive or appreciative experience and the active or creative, it will be seen to fall short in accounting for the latter aspect. Imagination is here listed and elsewhere spoken of as the highest intellectual faculty, but if both sides of the experience of beauty are basically instinctive and hence moral, imaginative seeing and imaginative composition cannot be put down as intellectual. The contradiction was never resolved, for the relation of morals to intellect was never clear to Ruskin, he covered it with apologies and sweeping insinuations that "Imagination" could not be analyzed.

6 "esthetic" In an early *Letter to a College Friend* (1840) Ruskin, already clear as to the theoretical importance of instinctive impressions of sense, makes definite justification of his position. "It might seem degrading our emotions of beauty to bring them down so completely to instincts, but as all our admiration of natural

objects is of course resolvable into admiration of color, form, and size, with that of power and motion occurring at intervals, it would seem just. It seems to be sometimes permitted us to trace the purposes of God in giving us these instincts."

7 "experience" The permanence and self-sufficiency of the impressions of sight gave Ruskin his chief justification for his belief in the superiority of painting and sculpture to all other arts (4, 35 n)

8 "Himself" This youthful sweeping generalization was denied in 1883, when Ruskin revised his text. See Wks 34, 46. His condemnation, however, is based upon pious rather than rational grounds, and I have kept it here because it is such an excellent example of the interpolation of Christian theology into the logical fabric of his argument. Such practice is characteristic up to 1850 or thereabouts, and again after 1870.

9 "beautiful" See Morgan MS (Wks 4, 364-5)

10 "emotions" See Dennis, John, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," 1704. In *Critical Essays of the Eighteenth Century*, edit. W. H. Durham, Dennis says (Chap. IV, "Enthusiastick Passion or Enthusiasm, is a Passion which is moved by Ideas in Contemplation, or the Meditation of things that belong not to common Life." He proceeds circularly to show that the greatest ideas are those that move the worthiest and wisest men and that the wisest men are moved most by religious ideas.

11 "accept." Furthermore, Ruskin falls into the error of popular neo-Platonic esthetics (Bosanquet, chap. II) in making the Deity first a cause of beauty and then an object of beauty itself. See Ruskin, Wks 5, Chapters IV and V, for the distinction between "Purism," "Naturalism" and "Sensualism."

12 "mind" On the preceding page, Ruskin has caught Alison in a careless use of the term imagination and has turned it into a kind of attempted refutation of Alison's theory, the phrase "confusion of terms" naturally refers back to Alison in this second diatribe.

13 "itself." From the Allen, now Morgan, MS of *Modern Painters* Wks 4, 366.

14 "fright" Wks 1, 441.

15 "impossible" In another passage this is even more explicit: "it is not the fear, observe, but the contemplation of death; not the instinctive shudder and struggle for self-preservation, but the deliberate measurement of the doom which is really great or sublime in feeling" (3, 129 seq).

16 "contemplation" Wks 4, 366-369, passages from the Allen, now Morgan, MS of *Modern Painters*. It is interesting to ob-



serve how Ruskin's emphasis upon "sympathy" forecasts the experiments of later theorists upon emotional responses. The feeling of sublimity or sympathy derived from large objects is to-day explained by "empathy" or a theory of the literal sympathy of muscular response.

17 "Stewart." See Stewart, Dugald, *Works*, edit. Hamilton, 1827, *Essay on the Beautiful* (1810).

18 "Later." Ruskin, *Wks.* 11, 225-226.

19 "suffering." For quotations and the comparison of Turner with Stanfield see *Wks.* 6, 10, and 15-20 respectively.

20 "scene." In the chapter "Imagination" Ruskin reverses this position without, it seems, being particularly conscious of the fact. The beholder here loves the object by identifying himself with it, the artist imaginatively active, loves the object in the sense of possessing it.

## PART II—MORALS AND IMAGINATION

### NOTES TO CHAPTER I—NATURE AND GOD

#### *Note*

This review of Ruskin's religious convictions has been made possible through the invaluable Index to the Library Edition of his works compiled by the editors. For more detailed information the reader is referred to the index heading "Religion" in volume 39. I am particularly indebted to E. T. Cook's *Life of Ruskin* to which I have omitted reference below.

1 "Chalmers." The Rev. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) wrote the first of the *Bridgewater Treatises*, "On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God," London, 1835.

2 "books." Neff, pp. 348-351.

3 "laws." Sedgwick, Adam, *A Discourse on the Studies of the University* (Delivered Dec., 1832), Cambridge, 1833. For following paraphrase and quotation in text see pp. 26, 40-42, respectively.

4 "developed." On this Sedgwick makes an interesting comment, especially in view of modern research in the study of the child: "Were I to speculate on the coming fortunes of the philosophic literature of this country, I should look forward to the time when some one, learned in physiology, instructed in all the laws of those elastic fluids by which we are surrounded and acted on, and skilled in the analysis of the inner workings of the mind, shall bring his strength to bear on this one subject, and present us with a work detailing the whole office of the senses, from childhood to manhood—from the dawn of reason to its full maturity" (p. 40).

All this, Paley had also disregarded by denying "the sanction and authority of the moral sense" and by using "utility as a touchstone of right and wrong." But Sedgwick distrusted the moral calculations which the doctrine of utility implied. "Man has not foreknowledge," he said, "to trace the consequences of a single action of his own, and hence, that utility (in the highest sense of which the word is capable) is, as a test of right and wrong, unfitted to his understanding, and therefore worthless in its application." (See pp. 54-57.)

5 "Whewell" Whewell's career is in itself a comment upon the tendency of the thought of this period in the difficult adjustment of scientific and religious matters. He was a school fellow of Sir Richard Owen, the naturalist. At Cambridge, he proceeded from *Mechanics* (1819) and *Dynamics* (1823) to *Astronomy and General Physics considered with reference to Natural Theology*, one of the eight *Bridgewater Treatises* (1830), and from *Four Sermons on the Foundations of Morals* (1837) to a two-volume treatise on the *Elements of Morality Including Polity* (1845) and a *History of Moral Philosophy in England* (1852). He wrote works on architecture also, and published in 1840 *The Logic of the Inductive Sciences* and in 1853 a treatise denying *The Plurality of Worlds*.

6 "contemplation" Whewell, *Four Sermons*, p. 40

7 "punishments" same, pp. 50-55

8 "righteousness" Whewell, *Elements of Morality* (Book III, Chapter XIV, No. 361). He considers "The steps by which we establish in our minds that internal Law which we call Conscience. It is established by such a Culture of our Reason as enables us to frame or to accept Rules which are in agreement with the Supreme Law, and by the agreement of our moral Sentiments with such Rules. Conscience as Law, is the expression of the condition at which we aimed, in our advance towards a knowledge of the Supreme Law."

Although Whewell himself thinks this Kantian, it suggests Jacobi or Fichte, rather than Kant, and is an excellent example of the religious misunderstandings of Kant common to Englishmen, which Mansell in the 1865 *Bampton Lecture*, spared no pains to correct. "Reason in Kant" denotes a discursive, not an intuitive faculty.

But Kant held that the highest truths (i.e., the unconditional) are not directly apprehended *per se*, but inferred to exist from the consciousness of those subordinate truths which depend upon them.

The use of the term *reason* to denote an intuitive faculty belongs, not to Kant, but to his antagonist Jacobi, who, in his later writings identifies Reason with what in his earlier writings he had termed Belief. Moreover, "Coleridge in his *Aids to Reflection* and Morell, in his *Philosophy of Religion* both exhibit the views of Kant's antagonist, apparently under the full conviction that they are those of Kant himself." See Preface (pp. lvii-lxix) to Coleridge, *Biog. lit.*, edition Shawcross.

9 "Paley" Paley had divided people into two classes, "those who deny the existence of a moral sense" and "those who maintain the existence of a moral sense, of innate maxims, of a natural con-

science, that love of virtue and hatred of vice are instinctive " etc Against the latter he had developed the most withering arguments which appear to have been derived from Tucker's *Light of Nature* Paley's *Moral Philosophy*, however, suffered a decline through the forties and when re-edited in 1859 by the Noetic, Richard Whately (*Paley's Moral Philosophy* with annotations by Richard Whately, D D, London, 1859), was accompanied by a critical essay which illustrates the change in attitude of the broad-minded University professor (see pp 18-27) Whately censures the utilitarian denial of moral faculties, repeating Sedgwick's arguments in stronger form, he also recommends for readings in Moral Philosophy, the essays of Bishop Butler instead of such writers as Tucker

10 "record." Butler, The Rev Joseph *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, with a preface by Samuel Halifax, D D, Oxford University Press, 1884 See pp 4 and 5 (Butler's *Analogy* was first published 1736)

But when Butler illustrates his points from "the whole course of nature", or when he comments upon the "natural government of God" or insists that "the author of nature in giving happiness and misery to his creatures, hath regard to their actions," he is clearly putting human nature first and external or objective nature in a subsidiary place (See p 139)

11. "lectures" *The Bampton Lectures in Divinity* were given every year from 1830 to 1850 with the exception of 1834-5 and 1841 Ruskin's contemporary, Henry Longueville Mansell, who had graduated in 1843, held this lectureship in 1858 and again in 1865

12 "digestion" The eight *Bridgewater Treatises* were by Dr Chalmers, Kidd, Whewell, Sir Charles Bell, P M Roget, Dean Buckland, The Rev Mr Kirkby and Dr Prout.

13 "application." Rousseau, as E H Wright points out, in his *Meaning of Rousseau*, Oxford, 1929, did not mean "that animal desire is our only guide", "that nature is all one for man and brute", "that the only way to be natural is to be savage" (pp 7-8) He believed that it was the nature of man to aspire toward his own full development because "the sentiment of conscience" itself was natural and innate "Man," says Wright in his lucid paraphrase, "is good by nature and meant to grow into morality" (p 137) Rousseau further held, like Ruskin after him, "that the moral sense has been essentially the same in every time and place", but he differed in an important respect from Ruskin and the "natural" moralists mentioned above in regard to the function and scope of conscience

In Rousseau's theory reason had an important rôle in the developing of the naturally good man, and reason in the sense of rational understanding rather than the transcendental sense of Coleridge or Fichte "Conscience," continues Wright, was for Rousseau "the moral force, reason the moral guide" Thus "we may be good before we can be moral, for goodness may be antecedent to morality even as is instinct to reflection" Thus similar to Ruskin, conscience is a part of the sensitive faculties of man; but unlike Ruskin and other moralists of the later period (with the exception of Newman and Mansell), morality is dependent upon reason for guidance (pp 13-15)

14 "Rousseau" Ruskin, Wks 18, pp xxxviii and lxi

15 "1847" See letter quoted Wks 8, xxv, with reference to friends Forbes, Sedgwick, Murchison and Lord Northampton, all at various times Presidents of various scientific societies

16 "architecture" Wks 8, xl, see also 9, xlvii, and 17, 271

17 "Philosophy" See Knickerbocker, William S, *Creative Oxford*, Syracuse, 1925, pp 52-56 "The liberal churchmen Coplestone, Whately, Arnold, Edward Hawkins and G Blanco White and R D Hamden were all part of an Aristotelian revival in Oxford and took guide in religious matters from Bishop Butler's *Analogy of the Christian Religion*"

18 "flood" Buckland was reader in Geology in 1819, Canon of Christ Church 1825, Dean of Westminster 1845-56 He wrote the sixth *Bridgewater Treatise*, published in 1837, the title of which might well fit in a sentence from *Modern Painters*: "Geology and Mineralogy exhibiting the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God" Buckland also preached a sermon in 1839 in Christ Church, entitled *An Enquiry whether the Sentence of Death pronounced at the Fall of Man included the whole Animal Creation, or was restricted to the Human Race*

19 "Buckland" For Ruskin's memories of, see Wks 35, pp 198, 200, 204-5, 385 See also 35, pp lxiv, lxv for account of Buckland's invitation to meet Darwin and others, and E T Cook, *The Life of Ruskin*, vol 1, pp 79-81

20 "religion" Ruskin's interpretation of Aristotle has been erroneously explained as "wholly in keeping with the ecclesiastical atmosphere and traditions of Oxford which Newman had revived," and Ruskin's definition of art has been said to be "reminiscent of Newmanism" (Knickerbocker, Wm S, *Creative Oxford*, Chap on Ruskin) These opinions are very open to question Newman's own views on Natural Religion and "Conscience" particularly, were not

at all in the naturalistic tradition Newman believed, of course, "that the whole Revealed scheme rests on Nature for the validity of its evidence," but he speaks of this evidence (in the same paragraph) as "the faint and broken accents of Nature," (*The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively*, Sermon, Easter Tuesday, April 13, 1830), and likens them "to some old prophecy," for he considered the ancient pagan religions to be part of Natural Religion which recognized a "wise and beneficent Prince of Nature" Knickerbocker himself points out that Newman came to a conclusion, after reading Butler, that the world of material phenomena, though connected, is of less importance sacramentally than "the more momentous system (or the ideal, 'noumenal universe') " (Knickerbocker, Chapter entitled "Newman's Idea of a University") Certainly Newman did not find that Bishop Butler's analogy was "formally drawn out" or that Natural Religion gave any "information respecting what may be called His (God's) Personality" (Newman, *Sermon on Natural Religion*) This, to Newman, was its shortcoming But this vagueness about the Deity, was also the weakest point in Ruskin's theology, in fact that point at which his theology went to pieces It was excellent evidence of the danger which Newman had perceived in the naturalistic rather than "the noumenal" religion

21 "individuals" Newman, *Sermon on Natural Religion*, pp 15-20 (Italics mine)

22 "Newman's" For Hooker, "All things do work after a sort, according to a law all other things according to a law, whereof some superior unto whom they are subject, is author, only the works and operations of God have Him for their worker, and for the law whereby they are wrought" (Hooker, Richard, Wks, Edited by John Kemble, M A, Oxford, 1888 See vol 1, p 200) Thus there is, one discovers, a "Natural Law," and a "Law of Reason" and a "Divine Law" (that which is not known but by special revelation) and a "Human Law" (same, vol 1, p 205) As to inclinations and conscience, they are part of "nature" and the "higher law," and "the eternal law of God's being, keepeth nature in obedience to her own law" (same, p 209)

23 "it" In letter to Norton, Sept, 1869, Ruskin refers to Linné in dispute over "abhorred, modern 'economists'" and quotes the preface (Wks 36, 591)

24 "held" "That existence," says Linné, "is surely contemptible, which regards only the gratification of instinctive wants, and the preservation of a body made to perish It is therefore,

the exclusive property of man, to contemplate and reason on the great book of Nature" This became the dedicated attitude of the English naturalists and certainly the sincere spirit of the scientists who immediately followed the romantic poetry at the turn of the century

25 "theology" Among the many editions and revisions of this great work by Carl von Linné, I have quoted from one translation by William Turbon, M D, London, 1806, to which men of Ruskin's time may easily have referred Ruskin's own copies (he owned more than one) were in the original Latin

26 "Mansell" *Letters, Lectures and Reviews* by H L Mansell, D D, ed by H W Chandler, M A, London, 1873 See particularly essays on "Kant," "The Imagination" and "Utilitarians"

27 "Scripture" Walker, p 81

28 "Victorians" The influence of the Christian transcendental movement at Cambridge upon the young Tennyson, John Sterling and F D Maurice is clear in their early work The movement had more far reaching influence than has been ordinarily perceived (See note 6, ch 11, part III, below)

29 "itself" Wks 4, 6

30 "inhuman" Wks 33, 173

31 "dialogues" See Carlyle *Shooting Niagara and After*, and for further references in Ruskin to these and like opinions, see Wks 17, 348, 20, 49, 23, 131-132, 33, 173 As for the term *Moral Sense*, he says in 16, 164 "To this fixed conception of a difference between Better and Worse, or, when carried to the extreme, between good and evil in conduct, we all, it seems to me, instinctively, and, therefore, rightly, attach the term of Moral sense ."

One of the most explicit references in Ruskin to Carlyle is the following "Read your Carlyle, then, with all your heart, and with the best of brain you can give, and you will learn from him first, the eternity of good law, and the need of obedience to it," etc (27, 180)

32 "order" Wks 15, 467

33 "art" Wks 26, 334

34 "run" Wks 17, 351

35. "man" See Wks 5, 359-60 where Ruskin protests that the artists who see largely the external world have less vision, even of natural objects, than those who study human nature

36 "Rousseau" Wks 18, LXII, letter to his father, 1862, and 18, xxxviii, letter to his mother, 1866, in which he says "but the intense resemblance between me and Rousseau, in mind, and even

in many of the chances of life, increases upon my mind more and more I cannot help wondering if the end of my life is to be in seclusion or in ill temper like his "

37 "God " Wks 7, 261-262

38 "notions " Wks 17, 350-351

## PART II

### NOTES TO CHAPTER II—THE ROOTS OF BEAUTY

#### Note

The following paraphrase and quotations of Ruskin's theories of "Typical" and "Vital Beauty" refer specifically to *Modern Painters* II, Part III, Sect I, Chaps V-XIV inc (Wks 4, 76-207) The full discussion of all the special terms mentioned, such as "Repose," "Unity," "Proportion," "Purity," etc, may be found in these chapters Where quotations or interpretations have been drawn from other volumes, they have been listed below In my discussion I have not followed strictly the order of discussion in the Ruskin text

1. "being " See Lauder, *Price on the Picturesque*, p 48 In defending the picturesque in landscape, Lauder says, "While the objects of the material world are made to attract our infant eyes, there are latent ties by which they reach our *hearts*, and whenever they afford us delight, they are always the *signs* or expressions of higher qualities by which our moral sensibilities are called forth " This is another fine example of how naturalistic ideas penetrated theories quite opposite to Ruskin, who had little use for the picturesque, and how all were seeking to give landscape a sanction thereby which religious subject matter once exclusively held

2 "inspiration " The source at this time might also have been Wordsworth, whose poetry he knew well, or even Bishop Butler's *Analogy* In 1840, when, traveling with his parents in Switzerland, he wrote to "a College Friend" "But what object has not something to do with God, and therefore with both infinity and mystery?" (See Wks 1, 441 ) This is the germ of the idea The term "typical" and the moral attributes are Ruskin's own additions to Greek esthetics and English theology Before the writing of the second volume, Ruskin was deep in one of the springs of the new naturalism—the first part of Richard Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*,



and it is hard to believe that Ruskin was unfamiliar with Bishop Butler's *Analogy* "Indeed," says Butler, "the *natural* and *moral* constitution and government of the world are so connected, as to make up together but one scheme" (Butler, *Analogy*, etc., ed 1844, pp 137-8)

3 "minds" See Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, ed 1844, p. 138

4 "care" For example, Ruskin thinks it would be foolish to infer literally the suggestion of "Infinity" from the curvature of lines (which, by the way, Hogarth mentions and does not think "foolish" in the least) In the ordinary contemplation of curved lines he observes no sensation of the kind

5 "Repose" The principle which he offers for measuring more or less repose is scarcely reasonable He says "Repose is greater in proportion to the amount of sublimity of the action which is taking place, as well as to the intensity of the negation of it" The modern theory of Empathy could offer illustration from lines, planes, volumes, etc., for both the idealization of muscular sympathy and for the conflict of stress which produces the degree of repose which Ruskin is trying to describe here

6. "group" It is clear from his discussion that he knew nothing of Lessing

7 "men" These Italians Ruskin had seen on his travels (in 1841 and 1845) and at this particular time had been led to appreciate them by the study of a then popular work *Poésie de l'Art Chrétienne*, by Rio

8 "importance" Plato's discussion of beauty emphasizes the principle of "Unity," in *Republic* III, 400-401, it is suggestive of the general application by Ruskin, Aristotle, moreover, develops similar views even more fully in *Poetics* VII and VIII

9 "sense" For this particular discussion see Wks 4, 96-102 Ruskin's analysis of "The Unity of Membership" is supported by a reference to Plato's *Tymaeus* (No 11, Jowett) His remarks upon variety and change bear the flourish of a quotation from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (I—C ii) which is not too pertinent He further inserts his characteristic quotations from Hooker and *Ecclesiastes* But these references to Plato and Aristotle do not suggest that he took his detailed notions from them They argue the reverse, for the most obvious discussions of "variety" and "unity" as such and their relationship are in *Phaedrus* 268 D, and in *Poetics* VII, 1-4, and VIII, 4 It seems to me useless to attempt to place any particular debt here, for the notions of unity with necessarily involved

variety are common stock of popular naturalist theory. They appear in Coleridge's discussions which are influenced by German philosophy. Coleridge, for example, comments on the presence of unity in variety, "so that in the midst of the multity" unity was for Coleridge the principle of beauty (See *Biog lit*, edition Shawcross, II—p 262). Such notions appear also in the poetry of Shelley (see *Mutability*, for instance), in Emerson and Bronson Alcott in America, and in the writings of Carlyle. They also appear in the Catholic theological naturalism of Patmore's and Francis Thompson's odes, later in the century.

Ruskin's discussion of proportion, however, as a form of the relationship of variety and unity, is probably quite original in the sense that any particular statement of such abstractions can be

10 "esthetics" This is of course exaggerated—the German esthetics as well as certain French had not entirely avoided this question, but I know of none who makes so sharp a distinction in this matter as Ruskin.

11 "architectural" Speaking of the opinions of architects upon the "scale" of buildings and their design Ruskin says "it seems to be held among them that a small building may be expanded to a large one merely by proportionally expanding all its parts and that the harmony will be equally agreeable on whatever scale it be rendered. Now this is true of apparent proportion, but utterly false of constructive, the error is often productive of the most painful results." He goes on to point out that decorative effect, which does not involve a consideration of strength of materials, weight and hence scale in a fundamental sense, is a matter merely of ratio and design, but constructive effect is a much more complex kind of relationship (See Wks 4, 103-4).

12 "forms" See Lauder, *Essay on Taste*, etc., pp 34 and 44.

13 "beauty" Now Ruskin justifies throwing out "Constructive Proportion" by an argument very inconsistent with much else in his theory. The perception of expediency, utility and such, he says, "demands a knowledge which we very rarely and imperfectly possess,"—i.e.—a knowledge of the material exigencies and purposes of all organic life (See No 15, Wks 4, 111). This is, to be sure, a large order, yet this is just the sort of impossible knowledge that he insisted the artist must attain intuitively where the ideality and the truth of the object were to be rendered. Surely, an ideal of abstract form is no more possible than an ideal of function; and in the case of the architect who must deal in constructive proportion the knowledge of the functional weights of inorganic materials

is granted But Ruskin remains perverse, and the extension of this argument into architectural principle and criticism in *The Seven Lamps* and *The Stones of Venice* remains the most contradictory and confusing of Ruskin's theoretical attempts Yet, whatever esthetic value Ruskin's criticisms of decorative architecture may be seen to have is due to this observation of the non-functional relationship of parts, or "Apparent Proportion"

14 "intelligence" *A Discourse on the Studies of the University*, Cambridge, 1833, see p 21

15 "circumstances" It is interesting to find the scrupulous and agnostic Thomas Huxley, only four years before he accepted Darwinism, alluding to the esthetic beauty of various forms in order to show the inadequacy of Cuvier's "Theory of physiological correlation" and utilitarian principles in general Cuvier's Theory offered a utilitarian explanation which Huxley believed failed to take account of the significance of moral beauty in species and destroyed sentiment See Peterson, *Huxley*, pp 85-6

16 "own" "Purity, a type of divine energy," says Bosanquet in his *History of Aesthetics*, pp 34-5, "solves the difficulties of sensuous presentation of 'unity' and presents a wonderful analogy with the idea as it first dawned on Plato" For the full comparison of Ruskin's idea of purity, etc, with the theories of Plato and Kant see Bosanquet, Ch I Ruskin's theory, however, is unique as applied only to art Shelley's use of light and motion is very similar, and both Browning's *will to act* and Carlyle's "Gospel of Work" hold the combination of moral purity with physical energy discussed above in Ruskin's notion See text below page 300, and Part III, Ch II, note 4

17 "beauty" For the quotations from Coleridge see "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty", *Biographia literaria*, Shawcross ed, vol II, p 251, "Essay on Poesy and Art," vol II, p 257, and p 262

18 "ideas" See Bosanquet, pp 47-48

19 "interpretation" But at the same time, Ruskin was avoiding Aristotle's intellectualization of virtue, by his own naturalistic doctrine In Chapter VIII, Book X, of the *Ethics* it is said that life which accords with non-speculative virtue can only be held to be happy in a secondary sense, because the virtue of emotions which have to do with the composite material part of our nature is human and not divine Only the happiness which consists in the exercise of reason and which is separate from these emotions is divine But Ruskin's theory of beauty is based upon "emotions", the happiness which art can afford is distinctly *not* of pure reason

Here he sharply differs, in evaluation of art, from both Aristotle and Plato. It would be absurd to defend Ruskin's claim that contemplation is quite "unintellectual" but moral, yet, the distinguishing characteristic of his theory is that contemplation is based upon an emotional sense of moral value, not an intellectual one. So with his social theories, he follows Carlyle to emotional intangibilities which conflict annoyingly with rational explanations of economic value.

20 "obscure." This constant perversion of Aristotle by reading Biblical context into the *Ethics* is singularly illustrated in a later volume by a discussion of the "familiar words of the Aristotelian definition of art—*μετα λόγου ἀληθοῦς*" (*Ethics* VI, 4). "I suppose," he says (Wks 19, 170), "that the words as written meant little more than the reasoning power shown in adaptation of means to ends in special work. But we cannot better the words, only we ought to take them in their widest and highest meaning, and reflect what would be the character of a human spirit governed by the reason, or, *if you like to say* instead of *μετα λόγου ἀληθοῦς*, *ἐν λόγου ἀληθείας* and translate 'by the word of truth' (2 Corinthians, VI, 7) in the practical employment of its virtues—governed, I say, by such reason or wisdom—its own communicated portion of the Logos, which was in the beginning, and without which nothing was made that was made (John I, 2, 3), the wisdom which in her work has respect to all the Laws, and in her aim to all the creatures of God, which in her perfect humility and her unselfish providence comprehends at once the feebleness of her hands and the infinitude of her sway; the omnipotence transmitted through her weakness which is allied to the whole heaven, and merciful to the whole earth."

But this is evangelical Christian "Naturalism" and very far from Aristotle. For Aristotle in this very passage is insisting that art is concerned "neither with things that are, or come into being, by necessity, nor with things that do so in accord with nature (since these have their origin in themselves)." Art, in short, though "involving a true course of reasoning" (*μετα λόγου ἀληθοῦς*) is concerned with the variable. (VI—4—1140a, Trans, W. D. Ross, Oxford, 1925.)

21 "creation." Ruskin disliked the term "creation" in reference to artistic composition for the reason that it seemed to divert the mind from what he thought was the true naturalistic basis of art. Just as naturalists *discovered* the "scientific" truth of forms, so the artist discovered the "truth of appearance" or poetic truth.

22 "Butler" See Bishop Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, etc., p 83

23 "virtue" Furthermore, Lauder maintains in his *Essay on the Origin of Taste* "that the *real* and positive beauty of the form or face arises from its expression of some amiable or interesting character mind—" thus emphasizing the "moral sentiments" in the beauty of the human form, which both the Academicians as well as the upholders of the "Picturesque" considered important associations in the experience of the beautiful.

24 "Man" (Wks 4, 180) At this time (1846) he had not read the *Nouvelle Heloise* or *Emile*, which later convinced him even more that it was no "Adamite curse" but religious "pride" that became the undoing of the "pious-minded" (See Wks 9, xxiii, 21, 131, 35, 440)

25 "piety" See Roe, pp 155-6 It is partly also because of his social approach to Ruskin that Roe overemphasizes the unity and the simplicity of Ruskin's theories

## PART II

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III—IMAGINATION

#### *Note*

The following discussion of Ruskin's capricious analysis of imagination is based upon three chief parts of his work *Modern Painters* II, Part III, Sect II, Chaps I-V inc (Wks 4, 223-332) where his formal analysis is given, an early *Letter to a College Friend* (Wks. 1, 420-422), and *Modern Painters* III, Chap VI-VIII inc (Wks 5, 102-148, also p 438), where Ruskin discusses idealism in art with less pedantry and considerable theoretical exactitude Besides these sources the Oxford *Lectures on Art* (1870) and the lectures on sculpture (*Aratra Pentelici*) have been used to define his various applications of the term The discussion of the relation of beauty to truth, at the end of this chapter, is based on *Modern Painters* II (Wks 4, 56-66) and III (Wks 5, 55-6) also Wks 8, 141 and 5, 111 To all of these sources references have been omitted, all others are listed in detail below

1 "disapproved" See *Readings in Modern Painters*, 1877, Nov 8 (Wks 22, 512) "I find now the main value of the book to be ex-

actly in that systematic scheme of it which I had despised, and in the very adoption and insistence upon the Greek term *Theoria*, instead of insight or perception, in which I had thought myself perhaps uselessly or affectedly refined "

2 "mystery" In the present discussion (*Modern Painters* II) Ruskin uses the term "Imagination" to refer specifically to artistic composition In later writing he is apt to play large and loose with it Sometimes he means by it merely the ability to charm oneself with fanciful rumination, or the power of "calling up lovely things" or the "guidance of pencil point along the visionary line" (See the letter to Miss Kate Greenaway, January, 1885, Wks 37, 597 )

Sometimes, widely distinct from this, he means the ability to build up literal religious symbols for supernatural beliefs which lead him to recognize intellectual symbols and a kind of saintly hallucination as legitimate types of imagination These remain contrary to his theory of beauty for instance, in the third of *The Six Lectures on Sculpture*, delivered in Oxford in November, 1870, Ruskin says he is using the term imagination in a special sense "the invention of material symbols which may lead us to contemplate the character and nature of gods, spirits or abstract virtues and powers, without the least implying the actual presence of such Beings among us, or even their possession, in reality of the forms we attribute to them" This is an extraordinary passage when one considers that Ruskin had gone through a period of religious disillusionment, for it will be noticed here, that there is no denial of their hallucinatory actuality It is a comment upon the tenacious persistence of the literal supernatural beliefs from his childhood

Again Ruskin uses *imagination* to convey the general sympathy or regard we have toward natural objects, vaguely speaking, the emotional basis for esthetic appreciation of things (See Wks 5, 438 ) Finally, more than once, he makes the word a symbol for a mystical insight, most often in a distinctly religious explanation of the vast but "natural" mysteries of the universe, or in his own phrase "the appearance of things to the soul of a man trained in the Christian faith," i.e., in *Natural Theology* (Readings in *Modern Painters*, November, 1877, lecture VII, Wks 22, 528 )

3 "God" Wks 4, 36

4 "1815" William Taylor (1765-1836) was instrumental in stimulating an interest in German thought, having travelled in Germany, he met Goethe and translated German poetry His magnum opus was entitled *Historic Survey of German Poetry* (1828-30) But in his *Treatise on Synonyms* the few implications of

esthetic principles seem to be in line with English empirical thought rather than German Idealism. A perception of this is perhaps what stirred Wordsworth's attack.

5 "literaria." An interesting letter written to Dr. Brown (Ruskin's college tutor) in 1843, six months after the publication of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, contains these statements: "I never heard of the Coleridge and Wordsworth dispute (where can I find an account of it?) but I should think from the character of the two poets that their dispute was not about the *expression*, but about the proper *matter* of poetry,"

As to his explicit observation of the character of the two men one finds below in the same letter the following: "Coleridge may be the greater poet, but surely it admits of no question which is the greatest *man*. Wordsworth often appears to want *energy* because he has so much *judgment*, and because he never enunciates any truth but with full views of many points which diminish the extent of its application, while Coleridge and others say more boldly what they see more partially. I believe Coleridge has very little moral influence on the world, his writings are those of a benevolent man in a fever. Wordsworth may be trusted as a guide in everything, he feels nothing but what we ought all to feel—what every mind in pure moral health *must* feel, he says nothing but what we all ought to believe—what all strong intellects *must* believe" (Wks. 4, 390-93). It is uncertain whether Ruskin ever read the *Biographia literaria*, no references occur.

6 "man." Wks. 4, 261. "Intellectual" is used here merely as a superlative in reference to his belief that poetic truth is of a higher order than ordinarily considered rational or intellectual truth.

7 "Stewart." Ruskin's criticism of Stewart's theory may be briefly summarized. Stewart defines imagination as conception, or simply apprehension of former objects of perception or knowledge from which a selection is made. The ways in which such selection is made are left unanalyzed except that a faculty called judgment or taste is seen to select materials and direct their combination, another faculty or process called *abstraction* is said to separate the selected materials from their qualities and the circumstances which are connected with them in nature, a particular habit of association, which he calls fancy, presents for our choice the different materials. Thus imagination is little more than memory plus a selection and abstraction of certain qualities from recollected experience.

Ruskin argues that there is no purpose upon which to direct or

determine the combination of these selected qualities. If taste is to approve, how is it to approve a combination of abstract elements before the combination exists? This demands from taste an act of prophecy which is inexplicable and it is just this inexplicable part which the metaphysician misses. Secondly, Ruskin finds that Stewart's illustrations of imagination, chosen from Milton, are merely "compositions of the commonest kind" and not imaginative at all. He admits that this composition in imagery is fanciful, it is what he should call fancy, but the difference between it and imagination is precisely what proves the inadequacy of Stewart's theory and demonstrates the fact that Stewart, when he thinks he is discussing imagination, sees no more than fancy. Ruskin illustrates his own theory by examples which are not mere combination, but metaphors, in which there exists a "particular mode of regarding the qualities or appearances of a single thing, illustrated and conveyed to us by the image of another." In these examples it must be observed that "the act of imagination is not the selection of this image, but the mode of regarding the object." It is this mode of regarding the object that determines the metaphor, such modes, he believes, never appear in mere fancy. (See Wks 4, 225-227.)

8 "imagination" "The knowledge of things retained in this visible form is called Conception by the metaphysicians, which term I shall retain; it is inaccurately called Imagination by Taylor, in the passage quoted by Wordsworth in the preface to his poems" (The reference is to the Preface of the 1815 edition Wks 4, 229-230, and 230 n.)

9. "identical" *Biog. lit.*, Edition Shawcross,—preface pp lvii-lxix.

10 "AM" same, 1, p 202

11 "her" same, "Essay on Art," ii pp 259-60

12 "world" same, Preface, pp lxxiv-lxxv

13 "association" Coleridge had as little use for a mechanical theory of association as Wordsworth or Ruskin, but his statement of the inadequacy of mechanical theory in Chapter IV of the *Biographia* is much more philosophical than Wordsworth's in the *Prefaces*, or Ruskin's later

14 "imagination" It must be kept in mind when pursuing the following discussion of imagination that Ruskin is using the term in a limited and precise sense as part of the esthetic experience, and not in any one of the more general senses employed in later writings. In 1870, for example, in the lecture entitled "Imagination" (in *Aratra Pentelici* or *Six Lectures on the Elements of Sculpture*)



given before the University of Oxford, Ruskin uses the term in a broadly religious and sometimes narrowly moral sense. The following is an illustration not only of how the term there stands for spiritual insight, but of his comment on the above discussion of imagination in Vol II of *Modern Painters*: "Well, then, this faculty of seeing Him or the higher creatures, which to mortal eyes are invisible, we properly call imagination. . . . Now all that I told of this faculty in the second volume of *Modern Painters* is wholly true, but it is expressly limited. Limited to what then I knew, that is to say, its action in arranging pictures of things remembered, under the guidance of a mystic power."

The term arrangement in this comment is unfortunate, for it throws the mind off the most important part of Ruskin's early concept of imagination, i.e., the element of organic unity, given in my text. Such is characteristic, however, of the vagueness and often fantastic religious earnestness of the lectures given in 1870, where it is clear that Ruskin was not nearly so interested in art as he was in propounding his principles of evangelical morality.

In 1883 Ruskin adds a note to the series of chapters dealing with imagination in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (Wks 4, 219-221). The principal substance of the note may be found in the following quotation: "In the first place, the reader must be warned not to trouble himself with the distinctions, attempted or alluded to, between Fancy and Imagination. The subject is jaded, the matter of it insignificant, and the settlement of it practically impossible. . . . This may be a prudent warning for the lay reader to heed, but for a student of the development of critical notions concerning art in this period it is merely the indication that another critic had grown old, tired and indifferent to the exact distinctions achieved on problems that once had a significant place in his intellectual development. It is possible to generalize about Ruskin's writing to the extent of saying that there is almost nothing of theoretical importance in the works written after 1869."

15. "fanciful." In 1846 Ruskin based this theory of unity on the interdependence of imperfect members, insisting that no likeness of members was allowable and that the presence of one member, perfect in itself, would make the others an excrescence. In 1883, this is denied as the *only* basis for imaginative or artistic unity, but it is admitted to be a partial basis.

16. "truth." Wks 3, 143-4.

17. "imagination." Wks 15, 476, *Laws of Péssole*: "Without encumbering himself, in practice, by any attempts to apply this, or

any similar geometric formulae, during the progress of his work (in which the eye, memory, and imagination are to be his first, and final, instruments) the student is vet to test his results severely by the absolute decrees of natural law, "Imagination, in short, is to be trusted while in the process of composing and checked by critical reflection upon the characteristic truths in nature

18 "conclusions" Hazlitt's notion of the ideal involves abstraction "The ideal, then, it appears by this account of it, is the enhancing and expanding an idea from the satisfaction we take in it, or it is taking away whatever divides, and adding whatever increases our sympathy with pleasure and power, 'till our content is absolute,' or at its height" Hazlitt further insists that the ideal is not something different from what is seen but rather making more intense the prevailing impression It is "not what a thing ought to be", it is simply "the highest point of purity and perfection to which we can carry the idea of any object or quality" The ideal does not transform any object or neutralize its character, the ideal, "by removing what is irrelevant and supplying what was defective, makes it more itself than it was before" (See *Essays on the Fine Arts*, edit W Carew Hazlitt, London, 1873, pp 130-135)

19 "mystic" See for one of the best discussions of this phase of esthetics Leo Stein, *A-B-C of Aesthetics*, pp 94-105

20 "Giorgione" Wks 4, 301 "Colour, without form, is less frequently obtainable, and it may be doubted whether it be desirable, yet I think that to the full enjoyment of it a certain sacrifice of form is necessary, sometimes by reducing it to the shapeless glitter of the gem, as often Tintoret and Bassano, sometimes by loss of outline and blending of parts, as Turner, sometimes by flatness of mass, as often Giorgione and Titian"

21 "decoration" This does not refer to symbols necessary because of the plastic medium used, such as typical the draughtsmen's signs for clouds, waves, roof shingles, etc

22 "Turner" See Wks 6, Chap 2, "Of Turnerian Topography"

23 "art" Though it is not explicitly stated until 1856 (Chapters on "The True Ideal" in the third volume of *Modern Painters*) the connection between imagination or ideal beauty and representative truth was plain to him as early as 1842 before writing the first volume of his famous book. See Wks 1, 470, *Letter to a College Friend*

24 "expression" Wks 12, 158, applying this principle to the Pre-Raphaelites he says, "the principal resistance they have to make is to that spurious beauty, whose attractiveness has tempted

men to forget, or to despise, the more noble quality of sincerity

" Ruskin goes on to show that it is because of their adherence to the principle of "absolute, uncompromising truth" that the Pre-Raphaelites have succeeded in avoiding spurious beauty

25 "Reality" Wks 4, 66, "The mirage of the desert is fairer than its sands," and see also Wks 4, 56, 5, 55-6 note

## PART II

### NOTES TO CHAPTER IV—THE MORALITY OF PICTURE MAKING

#### Note

The paraphrase and quotations of Ruskin's discussion of idealization in art have been drawn chiefly from *Modern Painters* V, Part VIII, "Ideas of Relation," Section II "Of Inventions Spiritual" (Wks I, 253-441), and from the chapters on "False" and "True Idealism" in *Modern Painters* III (Wks 5, particularly pp 71, 104, 111, 120-24, 130, 140-146) and the discussion of "Religious Imagination" in *Modern Painters* II (Wks 4, 314-32) References to these pages have been omitted, other references are listed below

1 "discover" The point at which they are focused most sharply in Ruskin's work is the section on the so-called "Ideas of Relation" in the last volume of *Modern Painters* (Wks 7)

2 "gone" "We speak glibly of the 'optimism' of the Victorians," says Nicholson (p. 12) in his superb critical biography of Tennyson, "but the word is misleading at best it was a courageous confrontation of the ruins of an easier, happier world, at its worst it was a real inability—an inability based on sheer terror of the consequences—to face facts"

3 "Tennysonian" Not that Ruskin would have included Tennyson among these pharisees! He was convinced of Tennyson's sincerity and his "purism" He would have found the *Idylls* good evidences of "Purist" and not "False Idealism"

He did not, moreover, permit himself to see this aspect of the Pre-Raphaelites until later years he rather wished to regard them as naturalists

4 "correction" For one, among many examples of the way in which Ruskin tried to take an active part in mending the existing state of things, see the account given of his part in the case against

Governor Eyre by Mrs Williams-Ellis, *The Exquisite Tragedy*, pp 232-235, and Ruskin Wks 17, lxxix, 18 xlv, and 18, 550 seq (See also Neff *Life of Carlyle* )

5. "Italy" Ruskin is very discerning in his comparison of the English with the Venetian attitude towards Religion He protests against the English habit of judging southern religions by the standards of their own northern temper If one is judging art in reference to religious sincerity one must understand "the temper of Venetian Catholics" "An English gentleman, desiring his portrait, gives probably to the painter a choice of several actions, in any of which he is willing to be represented As for instance, riding his best horse, shooting with his favourite pointer, manifesting himself in robes of state on some great public occasion, meditating in his study, playing with his children, or visiting his tenants, in any of these or other such circumstances, he will give the artist free leave to paint him But in one important action he would shrink even from the suggestion of being drawn He will assuredly not let himself be painted praying

"Strangely, this is the action which, of all others, a Venetian desires to be painted in If they want a noble and complete portrait, they nearly all choose to be painted on their knees" See Wks 7, 287-288, also Wks 4, 189n, in which the noble dignity and sadness of Venetian portraiture is compared with the modern vulgar concern for dress, good looks and trivial wealth

6 "Ideal" For a full summary of these latter painters, including Wouwermans and Giorgione see Wks 7, 372-373

7 "idolatrous." For this and following discussion in text, see Wks 5, 201-220 the famous chapter in *Modern Painters* III "Of the Pathetic Fallacy"

8. "other." For this and preceding discussion in text see Wks 20, 240-244

9 "itself" For these opinions see particularly Wks 5, 320 seq.; 12, 145.

## PART II

### NOTES TO CHAPTER V—STYLE

#### *Note*

The discussion of the three-fold purpose of the artist is based partly on *Laws of Fésolle*, Chaps I and II (Wks 15, 351-

364) and partly on a large number of scattered passages from *Modern Painters* III (Wks 5, particularly pp 123-4, 141-7), *Oxford Lectures* (Wks 20, pp 282, 207 respectively) Many references to these sources have been omitted

The paraphrase of Ruskin's views on "Great Style" is based on *Modern Painters* III, Chap III (Wks 5, 44-71), and Chaps. VI-VIII inc, "Of the True Ideal" (Wks 5, 102-148) Specific references to these pages have been omitted

The summary of Ruskin's discussion of "Skill" is based chiefly on *Modern Painters* I, Sect II, Chaps I and II, "Of Power" (Wks 3, 116-130), Chap IX, "Of Finish" in Vol III (Wks 5, 149 seq) and the chapters concerned with "Invention Formal" in *Modern Painters* V (Wks 7, 203-249) To these pages I have omitted specific reference and to *The Seven Lamps* (Wks 8, Chaps I-IV), *The Elements of Drawing* (Wks 15, pp 156-163) and *Oxford Lectures* (Wks 20, particularly pp 79, 98, 207, 214, 354) which illustrate Ruskin's opinions concerning style in its relation to character

In the last part of the chapter the general discussion of Ruskin's concept of "Power" is based chiefly on *Modern Painters* III, Chap I-III inc (Wks 5, 17-71) Detailed references to these pages have therefore been omitted All other references are listed below.

1 "man." Wks 5, 189

2 "character" For even though an emphasis is laid upon true facts (appearances) in art, one must remember that the significance of these facts of appearance is fundamentally emotional

3 "minister" Wks 16, 369

4 "art" In the second volume of *Modern Painters* this emphasis is obscured by the religious and moral didacticism, in *The Seven Lamps* also it is lost as occasionally in later writings, such as the chapters on spiritual idealization in the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* and certain parts of *Sesame and Lilies* This generally occurs by a confusion of "ideas of truth" with "ideas of relation" But the consistent emphasis between 1843 and 1845 and after 1850 is unquestionably upon a representative realism in which a faithful imitation of nature is stressed.

5 "effect" See Wks 6, Ch IV, No 13, 6, 358 shadows, 82 light

6. "delight" Wks 20, 165, see also 11, 201-2, among other expressions of the same view

7 "nature" Wks 4, 246-7

8 "it" What indeed becomes of the doctrine of true representation when, in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters* (Chap II, "Of Turnerian Topography") Ruskin defends at length Turner's rearrangement of nature? He may insist that arrangement of the parts of a picture merely changes the scale, that exaggeration does not mean "distortion." But he proceeds actually to justify painting the "unreal," if this "unreal" is really believed to be seen, not pretended (paragraph Nos 2 and 3). The more unconscious the draughtsman is of the changes he is making, the better "Love," he says, "will then do its own proper work." Turner's invention is described as "an entirely imperative dream, crying, 'Thus it must be.'" Yet Ruskin believes this dream "is the most accurate truth-telling faculty which the human mind possesses." So, too, with sculpture Ruskin reaches for the emotional reality rather than the mere perceptively graphic fact. The basis of all good sculpture may be said to be the imitative instinct, but the essence of its art is the expression of "internal emotion." There may be laws of naturalistic style which concern accurate perception of mass and plane and line but the realistic side of his doctrine is finally and irrevocably betrayed when he declares in *Aratra Pentelici*, "Carve only what you yourself feel, as you feel it."

9 "economy" Among many passages see especially Wks 16, 341, 19, 184, 197, 250, 266, 389, 418

10 "skill" The proper conception of skill is, in the first volume, the same as the conception of "Power." Only at a later time does the "Power" idea develop connotations beyond the limits of skill in the technical sense.

11 "perfection" These observations were probably stimulated by Reynolds' remarks upon the poetry and power in sketches where the means of expression were reduced to very nearly a minimum. See Reynolds, *Discourse* 8.

12 "Sketching" In the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* (Wks 7, 237-241), Ruskin gives an extended analysis of different types of sketching. This does not quite reverse his earlier insistence upon an "intellectual estimate" but it is clearly an intellectual estimate of emotional characters. He makes, for example, a distinction between what he calls Experimental and Determinant or Commemorative Sketches. The former are used in trying out different compositional effects, or different modes or manners of treatment for intended work. The latter are used by great masters either to "fasten down an idea in the simplest terms" (Determinant) or to record

facts for later pictures The first type of sketch is never an example of proper skill, for the artist is indecisive in his feeling for the right composition He has not yet decided what he wants Raphael's cartoons are among examples of this kind of work, they are admired by the age because, Ruskin said, the age is decadent So, too, the third type of sketch may be by mechanical composers, such as Raphael and Leonardo, completely misused, for records may be made simply to be changed, distorted or artificially composed into a picture The second type, however (Determinant), and the third, when properly used (Turner's Commemorative sketches, for example) are always firm and resolute in feeling If nature is changed, it is composed immediately as the sketching is in process, the notation in the form of sketch contains the impression, the emotional elements of true composition

13 "taste" Wks 4, 137n

14 "Heaven" Wks 15, 344

15 "liberty" See above, Part II, Chap II

16 "useful" (Wks 1, 235) There is a theoretical difficulty which might arise here, for anyone not acquainted with the devious parts of Ruskin's theory There is a possible contradiction in the relation of the doctrine that art must represent facts truly and the doctrine that every piece of art is the reflection of a personality This difficulty, however, is easily cleared away Ruskin regards the truth given by the great artist as the nearest approach to the absolute truth of appearance that a human being can achieve Yet this is also personal The great man's representation is characteristic of the object seen, it is also inevitably characteristic of himself The sensitive individual's statement is not only not the same degree of truth as other men's, but a different truth, different as the personality which apprehends it is different "What is usually called the style or manner of an artist," Ruskin says, "is, in all good art, nothing but the best means of getting at the particular truth which the artist wanted; it is not a mode peculiar to himself of getting at the same truths as other men, but the *only* mode of getting the particular facts he desires, and which mode, if others had desired to express these facts, they also must have adopted" (Wks 3, 193-4, see also *Letters to a College Friend* No 2; and *Catalogue of Turner*, 1857-8, Introduction No 12) Content and form are thus inseparable and both are expressions of the conditions of personality

17. "Plato." The passages are Phaedo, 80 A: "Nature orders the soul to rule and govern and the body to obey and serve Now which of these two functions is akin to the divine and which to the

mortal?" and 60 E—"The same dream came to me sometimes in one form and sometimes in another, but always saying the same or nearly the same words make and cultivate music, said the dream" Translation—Jowett

18 "Ruskin" It is possible that by 1859 he had read *Wilhelm Meister* but it is not until 1862 that he speaks of Goethe sympathetically or with understanding He writes his father from Milan, July 22nd (see Wks 36, 415), "My opinions are now one with Bacon's and Goethe's—and I shall not live long enough to be wiser than either of these men"

Whatever influence Goethe may have had on Ruskin appears rather after 1870 than before

19 "Liberty" Mill's essay *On Liberty* had just been published in 1859 Ruskin writes "The nature of all true authority and freedom, all that I have to say has been said admirably by J S Mill etc"

This is a singular allusion to the truth in Mill's writings About eight years later Ruskin found Mill "right at last" on the political issue of Ireland (Wks 17, 444) But these are the sum of his approvals At first Ruskin merely differed, later he condemned in no moderate terms Mill's political economy and all other speculative essays from his pen Ruskin's allusions are too numerous to give in detail In summary, however, it may be said that he criticized all Mill's fundamental concepts.—utility, wealth, law and liberty—believing that the ethical assumptions behind these were completely erroneous, being particularly enraged by Mill's insistence that morals in the ordinary sense had nothing to do with economics Ruskin admitted he had himself never read a line of Comte (Wks 28, 662-4) and a fair study of his objections to Mill proves beyond a doubt that he did not really understand much of Mill's economic theory He refused to try to understand the utilitarian theories of wages and rent in their detail terms, disagreeing violently with their ethical assumptions Even Ruskin's friend Norton split with him "painfully" over his opinions concerning Mill's genius and political economy in general (Wks 36, 580 and following letters)

Ruskin criticizes "*On Liberty*" for presenting only the facts for Liberty and none of those for "restraint", both he and Carlyle differed radically from Mill on the idea of Natural and Moral Law He suspects Mill of cowardice in concealing conclusions from his discussions of Rent (Wks 17, 442); he declares that Mill has no idea whatever ("nor any other Political Economist going") of "what things are useful and what are not" (Wks 27, 66.) In his later



writings he believes Mill's teachings dangerous because of their views on immortality, on the evidence of divine wisdom in creation, and on the substitution of patriotism for religion (Wks. 29, 243, 31, 291, 35, 462 )

In short, the older Ruskin grows the more vituperative he becomes on the subject of John Stuart Mill "The greatest thinker in England"—a phrase applied to Mill by one of the journals—becomes for Ruskin a cutting lash of derision, Mill is called a goose (Wks 28, 623, 29, 204) and a "flat-fish" type of political economist, with "one eyeless side of him always in the mud" (Wks 27, 180) Even after Mill's death Ruskin defends his own undignified petulance by the arrogant "Dead or alive, all's one to me with mischievous persons"

20 "to" He did not realize the full significance of the term "Power," until he came to his architectural studies—specifically, the sculptural features of the Gothic cathedrals he had chosen to examine Here, the very spirit of the craftsman seemed to him so important and so fundamentally related to the virtue of the art that "Power" is named as one of the seven attitudes of mind necessary to great architecture Architecture is explicitly divided into two groups those buildings marked by signs of beauty in the sense of precious or delicate features, and those marked by signs of power in the sense of severe, mysterious or sublime features (See Wks 8, Chap III, Paragraphs 1 and 2 )

21 "Power" It was by this very notion of power, though left implicit, that Ruskin could maintain the thesis that art is an exponent of character, and that "the architecture of a nation is great only when it is as universal and as established as its language" (See Wks 8, Ch VII, No 3, this is really a statement of one of the principal themes of *The Seven Lamps* and *Stones of Venice* ) Originality of expression, Ruskin said, never depends upon "invention of new words" or in art upon the invention of new signs, it depends upon the contemplation of reality by a great mind Originality seemed to him a by-product "an inevitable, incalculable and brilliant consequence," never in itself an intention or end It was the result of true inventive power.

## PART II

## NOTES TO CHAPTER VI—ESTHETIC RESPECTABILITY

*Note*

The paraphrase and the quotations of Ruskin's opinions on vulgarity and gentility are based on *Modern Painters* V, Chap VII, "Vulgarity" (Wks 7, 343-62) Specific references to these pages have been omitted below

The discussion of Piety, Goodness and their relation to art in Ruskin's theory draws from three chief sources *Modern Painters* II, Part III, Sect I, Chap XV, "Respecting the Theoretic Faculty," the *Morgan* and the *Hulhard MS* fragments published in the appendix to *Modern Painters* II (Wks 4, 372-81, and 381-83 respectively) I have omitted most specific references to these sources

The discussion of Ruskin's later views on the relation of art to religion, the exclusion of piety from art and the irreligious character of a painter's profession is based upon the second of the *Oxford Lectures* "The Relation of Art to Religion" (Wks 20, 45-72) and the *Brantwood MS* fragment (Wks 4, appendix 385-389) To these I have listed only a few general references

1 "earth" The similarity to Carlyle is very striking, for example, in such a passage as this ". greatness in art . . is not a teachable or a gainable thing, but *the expression of the mind of a God-made great man* . such a man is only sent upon the earth once in five hundred years, for some special human teaching" (Wks 5, 189-90)

2 "education" A discussion of Ruskin's views on education is impossible in this essay A summary may be found in the Index to the Library Edition by Cook and Wedderburn There is a passage, however, in *The Crown of Wild Olive*, which perhaps most perfectly sums up his views This, it must be said, is not strictly in accord with the theory of inheritance as given below "The entire object of true education," says Ruskin, "is to make people not merely *do* the right things, but *enjoy* the right things — not merely industrious, but to love industry—not merely learned, but to love knowledge—not merely pure, but to love purity,—not merely just, but to hunger and thirst after justice" (Wks. 18, 435.)

If love may be taught, then indeed, the inheritance of the gentleman's "sympathy" is of little account after all. But the predominant aims of his educational views are definitely summarized in the phrases "not attainment but discipline" and "moral first, intellectual secondarily" (See Wks 1, xxxiv, 28, 655, 19, 171, 7, 429, 34, 496, and 11, 263.)

3 "gentility" See again Index, Library Edition. Ruskin's belief that the "feelings of gentlemen" could be understood is found in Wks 29, 71, 27, 468, and 35, 551. For Ruskin on his own ancestors see Wks 28, 147-8.

4 "genius" The notion of the hero and of highly-bred genius occur in the following letters written about five years after his acquaintance with Carlyle began (shortly before 1850) and five years before the publication of *The Origin of the Species*.

"But the great things, which require genius to do, are done easily if you have the genius. If you are to do anything that is really glorious, and for which men will forever wonder at you, you will do it as a duck quacks—because it is your nature to quack—when it rains" (Letter to J. J. Laing, August 6, 1854) (Wks 36, 172.)

"You are, I see, still under the impression that people can become great painters, or great anything else, by application. If you read my books a little more carefully you will see this denied in every other page nearly. A great painter, a great man, is born great—born forever. No other person can ever approach or liken himself in the *slightest degree* to him." (To J. J. Laing, September, 1854) (Wks 36, 174.)

The influence of Goethe on Carlyle is, of course, obvious. It may be possible that Ruskin had been reading *Wilhelm Meister* at this time, for he becomes acquainted with Goethe's work between 1856 and 1862. He was unfamiliar with the *Conversations with Eckermann* (first translated by J. Oxenford in 1850), it is thus unlikely that Goethe influenced him directly for it is particularly in these conversations that Goethe relates genius and originality to an explanation of how the moral law works out in the world. "Genius," nevertheless, "is but that productive power by which deeds arise that can display themselves before God and nature and are therefore permanent" (See *Conversations*, edit. Wood, N. Y., 1901, p. 248.) "The moral element," moreover, "is no product of human reflection, but a beautiful nature, inherent and inborn."

Goethe seemed to meet the inconsistency arising out of this biological-moral theory more squarely than Ruskin. In *Wilhelm Meister*, Book II, Chap. IX, he throws the emphasis upon environ-

ment—"Let no one think he can conquer the first impressions of his youth" The principal idea of the famous novel, furthermore, implies the possibility of moral culture through experience Yet there are other indications (for example, p 189 of the *Conversations*) which imply that "a worthless man will always remain worthless" whatever his education

5 "others" Ruskin hastens to point out that the illiteracy of peasants and people who have no chance of acquiring letters is not vulgar, "but the illiterateness of the English school boy is" There follow amusing illustrations "There is no vulgarity in the emaciation of Don Quixote, the deformity of Falstaff, but much in the same personal characters, as they are seen in Uriah Heep, Quilp, and Chadband" See Wks 7, 353-4

6 "Death" Ruskin hastened, however, to explain—I suppose for the benefit of the vulgar reader—that "Death itself is not vulgar, but only death mingled with life" (See Wks 7, 361)

7 "order" See Neff, pp 202-7 on Hero theory, and pp 306-9

8 "sense" Wks 11, 201 and 212

9 "being" See Wks 19, 34 seq, for this general discussion

10 "heaven" Ruskin's concept of deity, as has been said, was a changeable essence During the period of 1858 to 1874, it consisted as nearly as possible, for one so given to prayer, in an impersonal theism This differed from the traditional Deist's doctrine in Ruskin's romantic tendency toward pantheism, and after 1860 in the introduction of humanitarian ideals By 1874, however, Ruskin began to swing back to a personal deity and a kind of catholicism which had no connection with the church but which included certain degrees of mysticism, an elevated religious awe, and a "fear of the Devil"

11 "doom." An illustration of such reflections is the following "The conditions of insanity, delighting in scenes of death, which affect at the present time the arts of revolutionary Europe, were illustrated in the sequel of this lecture but I neither choose to take any permanent notice of the examples I referred to, nor to publish any part of what I said, until I can enter more perfectly into the analysis of the elements of evil passion which always distorted and polluted even the highest arts of Greek and Christian loyal religion, and now occupy in deadly entirety, the chambers of imagination, devastated, and left desolate of joy, by impiety, and disobedience" (Wks 22, 171-2) Later, on page 202 of the same volume, Ruskin examines the gloomy and morbid characteristics of modern French revolutionary art

12 "character" An illustration of the effects of these emotions on powerful minds is taken from the poetry of Keats and Coleridge particularly, with an inference to be drawn regarding the sad effect upon Coleridge's character

13 "nude" Ruskin's opinions on the nude in art are to be found scattered through many volumes See particularly Wks 4, 196-98, 22, *The Eagle's Nest*, Nos 149, 164, 167, and 22, *Ariadne Florentina*, No 254n

Typical examples of Ruskin's views are as follows "I can assert to you as a positive and perpetual law, that so much of the nude body as in the daily life of the nation may be shown with modesty, and seen with reverence and delight,—so much, and no more, ought to be shown by the national arts, either of painting or sculpture What, more than this, either art exhibits, will, assuredly, pervert taste, and, in all probability, morals" (Wks 22, 234)

In general he held the anatomical study of the nude "destructive to every school of art in which it has been practiced," and he says of the immoral influence of this phase of art in *Time and Tide* (Wks 17, 364) "Take the love of beauty, and power of imagination, which are the source of every true achievement in art, let the Devil touch them with sensuality, and they are stronger than the sword or the flame to blast the cities where they were born, into ruin without hope"

14 "explicit" According to the editors the fragment from the *Brantwood MS* (Wks 4, 384-89) this irreligious point of view falls in a period between 1856 and 1870 But the fragment contributes to the discussion of questions raised in *Modern Painters* II and is thus placed in the appendix to that volume

15 "admired" Wks 4, 385 The exact date of this *Brantwood MS* is undetermined It was intended for the second volume of *Modern Painters* when revised, and was written much later, as the character of the opinions indicates, than the first manuscript of that volume Probably it was composed sometime between 1859 and 1875

16 "men" The analysis of emotion here is not only sketchy but confusing and Ruskin never cleared it up

17 "it" See notes to *The Stones of Venice*, I, appendix 17 (Wks 9, 456)

18 "energy." See for one of the fullest of Ruskin's discussions of this subject, "On the Relation of National Ethics to National Arts" (Wks 19, 163 seq)

## PART III—"HIGH SERIOUSNESS"

### NOTES TO CHAPTER I—THE MORAL CONFLICT

#### Note

The discussion of Ruskin's economic views in relation to his theories of art is based largely on *Munera Pulveris* (Wks 17, particularly pp 152-4), *Time and Tide* (Wks 17), and *The Crown of Wild Olive* (Wks 18) To these sources I have omitted reference

1 "Rousseau" See above, Part II, Chap I

2 "understand" Wks 20, 52

3 "Goethe" (See Howe, S, pp 88-91) For an explanation of how deeply the idea of work enters Carlyle's hopes for a better society, and how "the ability to do useful work, whether physical or mental" underlies his theory of the hero—see Neff, E, 1926, pp 217-220 and 301-309 The following passage from Roe, p 93, even further affirms the importance of this doctrine "Self-realization, which is the aim of life, depends therefore, upon action, upon work, and the call to duty becomes a gospel of labor, the corner-stone of Carlyle's social philosophy"

4 "Carlyle" It is interesting to note that behind Goethe's doctrine of work lay a theory of energy—the highest gift we receive from God Like Ruskin, Goethe had no use whatever for Bentham, Utilitarians or a God of Utility (See *Conversations with Eckermann*, edit Wood, N Y, 1909, p 353) See also Robertson on the doctrine of *Das Hochste* and Goethe's Leibnitzian Phraseology

5 "justice" Wks 17, 63

6 "art" This was easy in the first volume of *Modern Painters*, for landscape omitted sexual elements Ruskin's emphasis on landscape and his fondness for mediæval religious painting may be partly explained by this prejudice

7 "esthetics" See Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp 124-128

8 "him" See Phi Beta Kappa address, Cambridge, 1837

9 "religion" See Roe, F W, p 92, and Emerson, *Divinity School Address*, Cambridge, 1838

10 "Indians" (Wks 17, 349-50) The best instance of Ruskin's respect for the modern criticism of Biblical text is his defense in 1875 of Colenso, the Bishop of Natal Colenso, because of his textual criticism, had been deposed and excommunicated, and in January of that year was inhibited by the Bishop of Oxford (Wilberforce) from preaching in Carfax Ruskin flared to dramatic indignation and by innuendo struck at the ignorance of the English Bishops He even dared them to contradict Colenso "before Max Muller or any other leading scholars of Europe"

Ruskin's actual attack upon the Bishops occurs in *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 49 see Wks 28, 244-5, for an account of this dispute see Wks 14, 285n, and for Ruskin's comment upon literal reading of the Bible which is in line with the skepticism of his middle period see Wks 17, 348

11 "himself" See Emerson, *Journals*, 1833, after he had met Carlyle

12 "intolerable" Ruskin's opinions concerning Darwin and Darwinism are varied and scattered through his work They consistently follow a tendency toward reactionary denial of the importance of the theory of Evolution, while never actually reaching a denial of the theory itself In 1867, Norton introduced Ruskin to Darwin with whom he was pleasantly impressed (Wks 19, xlv-v) In 1869, Ruskin speaks with respect of Darwin's "unwearied and unerring investigation every day rendering his theories more probable" By 1870, however, he avoids being drawn into discussion of the scientific issue and by 1877, while referring to "the Darwinian theory in all its sacredness, breadth, divinity, and sagacity" (Wks 24, 177), he argues the importance of what we are today, as against what we came from By 1886, Ruskin is finally contemptuous and violent on the subject, though still "cunning" enough to avoid the question as a scientific issue He believes the interest in it is a sign of the moral decadence of the times

13 "classes" See Wks 15, xix-xxi and 16, xxxi, 431-2 where the purpose of the courses in the Working Men's College is stated Ruskin said distinctly that he was not trying to turn a carpenter into an artist, but he hoped to make him a better carpenter

14 "usury" See Wks 20, 113-14, 25, 45, and 18, 177 among many others For his views on usury, two passages are illustrative—Wks 17, 220 and n and 17, 271n

15 "Ghost" Wks 20, 116 and 172-74

16 "rationally" In one of his most lucid and rational economic discourses there is the statement that "certain emotions are not to be thought of except as more or less mechanical or animal forces, which must be dealt with by similar forces, not by reasoning"

17 "sorrow" For preceding quotations in text see the third *Oxford Lecture*, 1870, Wks 20, 93-94 and 107

18 "source" Roe says (pp 179-80), "The inspiration for social reform came to Ruskin from art His clue to the solution of social problems came also from art, and chiefly from architecture . ." "The earliest suggestion of the precise form which his social thought was to take may be found in two or three passages in *The Seven Lamps* (1849) where he drew the attention of his readers to the bearing of architecture upon the condition of workmen The idea of mental interest in work, the alpha and omega of Ruskin's social philosophy was fully developed for the first time in the famous chapter on Gothic architecture in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53), one of the most convincing and most eloquent statements of social reform in the nineteenth century"

Roe seems to me slightly erroneous in his emphasis upon architecture as the particular source of the social creed, though there is no doubt that the architectural criticism aided in shaping the outlines of the social theory But there is a reference in an early letter (1840) to the ugly poverty-stricken conditions in Manchester The discussions of "Purity" in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846) contains the principal roots of the social theory, specifically in the identification of energy, health and creative work But it must be remembered that Ruskin never accepted "mental interest" in industry or the machine, and that the principles of the chapter on Gothic are scarcely applicable to an industrial society ten or more times as large in population as that of early nineteenth century England Though eloquent, Ruskin's "statements of social reform" are less convincing than Roe seems to consider them, and the specific incidents stimulating the formation of their exposition in *The Seven Lamps*, actually occurred in a small Scotch village among hand laborers who had no connection with industrialism

19 "story" Wks 17, 274-5

20 "heaven" Carlyle, *Past and Present*, Book III, Chap XII He quotes Burns on his own songs "By Heaven, they shall either be invaluable or of no value, I do not need your guineas for them!"

21 "money" Wks 27, 68 "Will you, any of you, have the goodness—beggars, clergymen, workmen, seraphic doctors, Mr Mill,



Mr Fawcett, or the Politico-Economic Professor of my own University—I challenge you, I beseech you, all and singly, to tell me what I am to do with my money” (*Fors Clavigera*, April, 1871)

22 “impulse” See Roe the chapter “The Sword of Saint George” gives an excellent summary of Ruskin’s Utopian ideals and his practical suggestions for reform The distinction between the different socialistic and aristocratic concepts is clearly presented Ruskin is “not a leveler” nor a democratic republican for he believed “the majority of voters fools” Yet his socialism is implicit in his notions of “the function of the State”

23 “Victorians” See Thorndike who believes that even “Carlyle’s own interest in the marvels of factories was soon overwhelmed in his commiseration for the white slaves toiling in bondage without hope” Chapter IX discusses the attitudes of literary men toward “science, invention and machinery” and (pp 246-249) particularly mentions Carlyle, Arnold, Butler and others on machinery

24 “emotions” See Wks 15, 210 (1857) for this discussion

25 “us” See the Inaugural *Oxford Lecture* (Wks 20) for general discussion of the lack of true perception of artistic excellence.

## PART III

### NOTES TO CHAPTER II—RUSKIN’S CONTRIBUTIONS

1 “antipathy” By “antipathy,” Bentham means the sentiment — “I detest the thought of it” This, he says, “is the cause of an action which is attended with good effects, but this does not make it a right ground of action” See *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Edit, H Froude, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891

Again, says Bentham, “Antipathy or resentment requires always to be regulated, to prevent its doing mischief” and regulated, of course, by the principle of utility (same, p 23)

2 “pages” The so-called theological principle of “The Will of God,” is not, Bentham thinks, a separate principle but falls in with the above shibboleths Those who try to follow “The Will of God,” argue according to Utility, Asceticism, or mere Caprice in their actual interpretation of God’s will (same, p 10)

3 “present” One man says, he has a thing made on purpose to tell him what is right and wrong, and that it is called a *moral sense*;

and then he goes to work at his ease, and says, such a thing is right and such a thing is wrong—why? ‘because my moral sense tells me it is’ ” See same, p 17n Could anything be a more perfect description of Ruskin’s logic in his prophetic passages?

4 “casuistry” William Godwin, of whom Ruskin appears unaware, was about the only expositor of consistency at the birth of the century, but his psychology (largely taken from Helvetius) and his purely environmental or rational morality was soon riddled by the fire of romantic intuitionism His *Political Justice* (1793) primarily a work on ethics, was, he says in the introduction (*Political Justice*, 2nd Ed, 1796, Vol I, p vi) “to be an advantageous vehicle of moral movement”

5 “scorn” Or if one wishes to push the contradiction back one step further, the question would draw forth the fundamental dualism of Rousseau in his curious distinction between *l’amour de soi* and *pitié*, both of which in the *Discourse on Inequality* are considered “equally primal to us” and in *Émile* have been superficially reconciled Wright says (p 13n) that Rousseau “wavers as to the relation between these two instincts,” but “with no essential change in meaning” The question, however, remains an open one, especially in reference to utilitarian and later moral theory whether the dualism was reconciled or not There are profound shades of meaning in the translations of *amour de soi* as “self love” or “the instinct of self-preservation” From which meaning is *pitié* derived? (See Wright, pp 19-21, also the discussion of pride which is more involved)

6 “Ruskin’s” The struggle between scientific materialism and “ideals” is perfectly mirrored in *In Memoriam*, but science is already associated by Tennyson with despair, and ideals with hope. Yet just as Coleridge had perceived that in regard to Nature “we receive but what we give” that “in our life alone does Nature live”, so Tennyson finds Nature, a “hollow form” Later he focuses the eternal question in memorable form—the question that sooner or later had to be asked of the traditional theology by all Victorians

“Are God and Nature then at strife,  
That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life”

He was, however, not ready with the answer which the society of his day later worked out and, toward the end of the poem, he returns to the Naturalist’s faith probably learned at Cambridge

"I curse not Nature, no, nor Death,  
For nothing is that errs from Law"

7 "dancers" See Emerson, *Journals*, 1833 (See Carlyle, *Life of Sterling*, Boston, 1852, p 82 See Froude, *Carlyle's First Forty Years*, I, p 158)

8 "natural" For an excellent summary of Carlyle's moral philosophy see Neff, E, 1926, pp 346-7

9 "gentility" See Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy (Sweetness and Light)*, London, 1869

10 "pleasant" See Chandler, H W, *Letters, Lectures and Reviews by Henry Longueville Mansell, D D*, London, 1873, pp 369-371

11 "Whewell" See for account of these writings Neff, E, pp 349-365 As early as 1835 John Stuart Mill was writing a severe criticism of Sedgwick's *Discourse on the Studies of the University of Cambridge* in the *London Review* and this is followed in 1852 by a thoroughly demolishing review of Whewell's *History of Moral Philosophy* (published in 1845) Finally, Mill's theories are summed up in his posthumously published *Three Essays on Religion* (1874) Mill carefully examines the term "Nature" and finds it ambiguously standing for "what is" and "what ought to be" as well as for "the rule of or standard of what ought to be" (See Mill, J S, *Three Essays on Religion*, pp 12-14, N Y, 1874)

12 "followers" Mansell's attack on Mill in *Morals and Utilitarians* (from the collection *Letters, Lectures and Reviews* edited by H W Chandler, London, 1873) is, in this connection, interesting and his brief historical note relevant to the issue of Ruskin's reliance upon the moral faculty He says "Our moral faculty, according to all those of its interpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers" (it will be noticed that he does not include Rousseau in this list), "supplies us only with the general principles of moral judgments, it is a branch of our reason, not our sensitive faculty, and must be looked to for the abstract doctrines of morality, not for perception of it in the concrete" This is a large qualification of Ruskin's position, for Ruskin not only connects the moral faculty with sensitivity, thinking of conscience (as did Rousseau and others) as a moral sentiment, but he throws all matters of sensual perception under the moral faculty

• Mansell points to Aristotle as "distinctly" recognizing a moral sense and even speaking of it "as a sense" He also alludes to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Warburton and Bishop Butler whom he

quotes liberally (See *Letters, Lectures and Reviews*, pp 372-3) But Mansell's references to Butler, if followed up, do not sustain his own nice position, for Butler and Warburton use the moral sense as an absolute source of moral criteria, admitting, it seems to me, even less to reason than does Rousseau, they blend the moral sense on the one hand with a perception of natural law, and on the other with revelation through the scriptures, which after all is Ruskin's position Moreover, the blend of naturalism with conscience is apparent in Mansell's own thought when he says " we recognize the *innate* and inextinguishable conviction implanted in the minds and consciences of the human race by Him who gave to man a physical and moral existence, a body subject to the *laws* of matter, a soul conscious of its superiority to matter " (p 378, italics mine ) Natural theology even to the most metaphysical of Divines was inescapably involved

13 "Morals " See Harrison, Frederick, *The Philosophy of Common Sense*, Essays, "A Basis to Morals" and "Natural Theology" (written between 1871 and 1880), London, 1907 The substance of this opposition betrays the intensity of the views held on both sides, and some of the anti-naturalism must have been aimed at Ruskin It is difficult, indeed, to believe that Harrison has not Ruskin in mind when he says "If all morality is to depend on the question—how far does it conform to the design with which Man was created?—we must have that design ever before us, defined in all its breadth and its precision This we can only get from a specific revelation Natural Theology and the light of Nature give the most opposite conclusions." But it might have been almost any of the above mentioned prophets of Victorian moral and social truth "

14. "wrote " Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of T H Huxley*, London, 1900, vol 2, p 305.

15 "nature " See Wks 5, 359-360, where Ruskin discusses nature worship versus the study of human nature and divides authors accordingly, and appends a note to add Rousseau to this list with his own and Rousseau's interest in human beings.

16 "him " Wks 17, 480-82

17 "life " Lecturing in 1858 before a gathering of working men in St Martin's School of Art, Ruskin declared that the student who came "to gain a knowledge of art as it bore on practical life in general" he considered "the most important of all", (see Wks 16, 456) for "to put the happiness and knowledge which the study of art conveys within the conception of the youth" (Wks. 16, 450)

seemed to him the first end of the study of art Yet, "the great business of art," he said, is "not only to produce things, but to see them, and to enable others to see them" (Wks 16, 456) This led him to stress environment "I have been ten years," cries Ruskin in 1870, "trying to get this very plain certainty" thought of as anything but a monstrous proposition To get your country clean, and your people lovely,"—that is "the beginning of art" (See Wks 20, 107, also 19, 214-15)

18 "truth" Wks 16, 456

19 "addressed" For the sources of this paraphrase see Wks 20, 45 (italics mine), 97, 66, 46 respectively

20 "Sismondi" Sismondi of Geneva in his *Nouveaux Principes d'économie Politique* (1819) composed a striking protest against orthodox economics He insisted on the fact that economic science studied too much the *means of increasing* wealth, and too little the use of wealth for producing happiness He objected to "laissez faire" and argued for intervention "to regulate the progress of wealth" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)

21 "economy" See Ruskin, Preface to *Modern Painters* II, 1983 (Wks 4, 5-7), and *Letters to Norton* (36), numbers 579, 587

22 "hope" Wks 7, 257

23 "is" Wks 18, 442-3

24 "before" See Wks 35, 396-98, where Ruskin quotes a passage from Smith The sentence is somewhat confused by the order of phrase Ruskin means, of course, that Sydney Smith had "discerned and adorned," etc, twenty years before, not that he "wished to establish" twenty years before

For other references to what in later years Ruskin felt was the great importance of Sydney Smith's *Moral Philosophy*, see Wks 34, 564-65, 37, 569

### PART III

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER III—CONCLUSION (Unsettled Questions)

1 "art" For Ruskin's use of the term "sensation" see Wks 25, 123

2 "generations" (Wks 20, 208-9, italics mine) Ruskin refers to a scene at the end of the second part of *Faust* from which he infers Goethe's esthetic doctrine The fiends in hell cannot sing properly

and cannot stand the sight of the roses that the angels are scattering about Both incapacities, Ruskin observes, are excellent examples of bad taste and the meaning is that this fiendish taste has its root in the fiendish character What is of ox or swine in human nature perceives no beauty, either sensual or formal or what we should call "plastic" "What is human in you," he adds, "in exact proportion to the perfectness of its humanity, can create it" (beauty), "and receive "

3 "nature" Concerning the "will" and "nature" Schopenhauer says " we ourselves are the will whose adequate objectification at its highest grade is here to be judged and discovered Thus alone have we in fact an anticipation of that which nature (which is just the will that constitutes our being) strives to express" (*The World as Will and Idea* Trans Haldane and Kemp, 6th ed, London, 1907, Vol I, p 285 )

Concerning contemplation of objects of art Schopenhauer says " we are no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals but as pure will-less subjects of knowledge we recognize in the object, not the particular thing, but an Idea, " (same, pp 270-271 ) But Ruskin believed "the particular thing" was very important to art the particularity partly defined the characteristic degree of the perfection of the object

4 "partnership" Dewey, John, *Experience and Nature*, p 179

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